

# JEEVADHARA

## A THEOLOGICAL TRIBUTE TO RAIMON PANIKKAR

Edited by

Sebastian Painadath

PROCESSED

OCT 18 2011

GTU LIBRARY

Vol. XLI    2011

ISSN 0970 - 1125

No. 245

# JEEVADHARA

is published every month  
alternately in English and Malayalam

## FOUNDER EDITOR

**Joseph Constantine Manalel**

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**Kuncheria Pathil**

## SECTION EDITORS

*Societal Concerns*

**Felix Wilfred**                    **Sunny Maniyakupara**

*Word of God*

**Rekha Chennattu**                    **George Edayadiyil**

*The Living Christ*

**Jacob Parappally**                    **Jose Panthackal**

*Communion of People*

**Kuncheria Pathil**                    **Vincent Kundukulam**

*Harmony of Religions*

**Sebastian Painadath**                    **P. T. Mathew**

*Fulness of Life*

**Mathew Illathuparambil**                    **Mathew Paikada**

**Secretary**

**P.U. Abraham**

# *jeevadhara*

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

---

## A Theological Tribute to **Raimon Panikkar**

Edited by:

**Sebastian Painadath**

Malloossery P.O.,

Kottayam - 686 041

Kerala, India

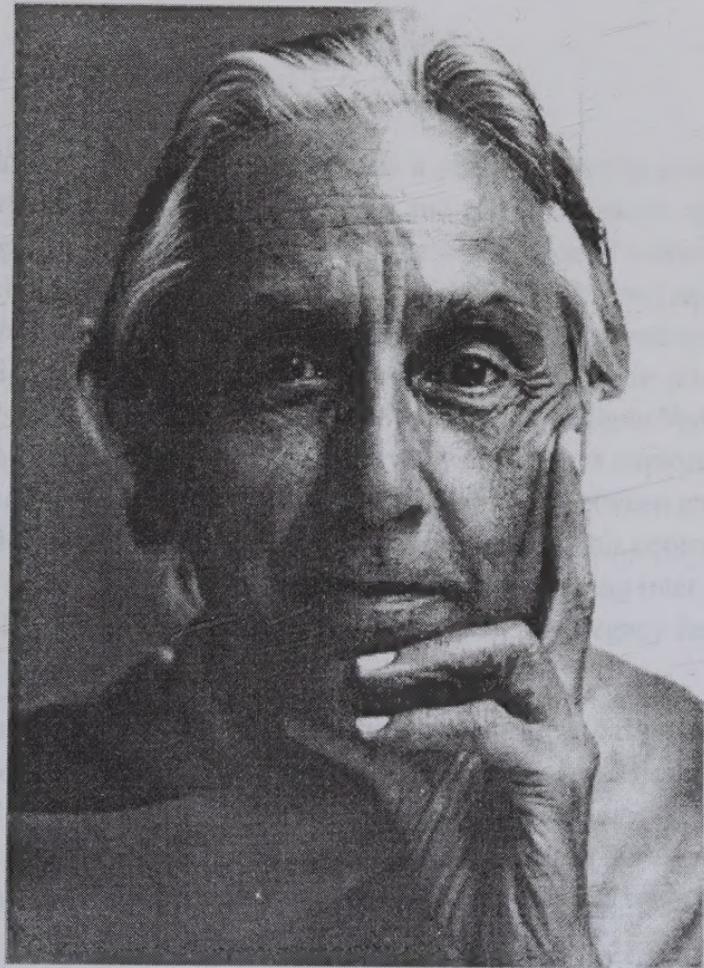
Tel: (91) (481) 2392530, 2397017

E-mail: jcmanalel@gmail.com

Web: [www.jeevadhara.org](http://www.jeevadhara.org)

## CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Editorial</b>	<b>341</b>
<b>Raimon Panikkar's Pluralism</b> <i>Francis X. D'Sa</i>	<b>343</b>
<b>The World is charged with the Grandeur of God</b>	<b>359</b>
The Relevance of Raimon Panikkar's Symbol Approach <i>Clemens Mendonca</i>	
<b>Raimon Panikkar's Notion of Rhythm</b> <i>Nishikant M. Borge</i>	<b>373</b>
<b>Raimon Panikkar, the Bridge-BUILDER among Religions and Cultures</b> His Contribution to a Hindu- Christian Theology <i>Anand Amaladass</i>	<b>386</b>
<b>Cultural Innovation</b>	<b>401</b>
Some Implications of Panikkar's Sacred Secularity <i>L. Anthony Savari Raj</i>	
<b>Raimon Panikkar's Mantra for Discovering Meaning in Life: "The Cosmotheandric Vision"</b> <i>Jacob Parappally</i>	<b>419</b>



## Raimon Panikkar

Francesca Gherardi's review of Raimon Panikkar's *Conversations with Raimon Panikkar* (see "Reviews" in this issue) has brought to mind the words of the Dalai Lama, published recently in *Time*, describing "Tenzin" as "one of India's most remarkable religious leaders."



## Editorial

Raimon Panikkar left us in body a year ago. But he continues to live in the hearts of many theologians and spiritual seekers, artists and philosophers across the continents. The confluence of cultures – that was his being, his existence and his way of thinking. He lived and thought *on the boundary*: on the ever-widening boundary between spirituality and religion, between philosophy and theology, between science and mysticism, between the East and the West, between Hindu Vedanta and Christian faith. Hence his perspectives were always explorative. He explored the “loving knowledge” in the dialectics between gnosis and agape, logos and mythos, theology and theosophy. This contemplative pursuit of wisdom, this theological search in an ongoing inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-disciplinary process is the legacy he has left behind.

This issue of *Jeevadharma* is a tribute to this great Indian theologian (or better a spiritual pathfinder of the entire humanity). His explorative method in theology shows the right direction for theological pursuits in today’s pluralist culture, and for spiritual harmony in the encounter of religions as well. Six Indian thinkers, who were deeply touched by the person and vision of Raimon Panikkar, reflect here on the unique significance of his perspectives. Each one focuses on one central point of wisdom shared by Panikkar:

Francis D’Sa dwells on the underpinnings of “*mythos in logos*”; Clemens Mendonca highlights the vision of “the world as the symbol of the Divine”; Nishikant Borge describes “Rhythm” as the basic dynamics of Reality; Anand Amaladass explores the values of “homeomorphic

equivalents" in inter-religious encounters; L. Anthony Savari Raj reflects on the consequences of "Sacred Secularity" in the process of cultural innovation; Jacob Parappally finds in the "cosmotheandric vision" the mantra for discovering meaning in life.

Raimon Panikkar was very closely associated with *Jeevadharma* from its very inception. May this number of the journal be a token of gratitude, an expression of esteem and above all an evidence that his theological legacy will be taken seriously in our theological pursuits.

**Sebastian Painadath**

Samkeesha

Kalady- 683 574

## Raimon Panikkar's Pluralism

Francis X. D'Sa

Dr. Francis D'Sa focuses on Panikkar's interpretation of *mythos* in the creative process of inter-religious dialogue. It is *mythos* that enlightens *logos*. Without the background reality of *mythos*, the foreground truth about *logos* remains unintelligible. Without being sensitive to the trans-forming faith-experience and its mythical metaphors inter-religious encounter remains just a discussion at the informing conceptual level. Hence Panikkar argues for a *dia-logical dialogue* with a *dia-topical hermeneutics*. Dr. Francis D'Sa SJ has been Professor at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, and at the Theological Faculty, Würzburg (Germany). He is the founder-director of the Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune 411014

*I formulate pluralism by saying that truth belongs not only to the realm of the logos, but that it pertains also to the order of the mythos.*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Dialogue of religions is primarily a dialogue of cultures and makes sense in the context of plurality of religions and cultures. One does not experience the urge or the need to dialogue where there is no plurality of religions and cultures. This is readily verifiable both in the case of theological faculties and among the rank and file of the faithful. In the now (notorious for some and renowned for others) "Memorandum" of

1 Raimon Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 249.

German speaking theologians I pointed out this lacuna, not that I was surprised by it.<sup>2</sup>

A veritable plurality of religions as is the case in India, for example, is not (yet) found in Europe. Obviously the Europeans are acutely conscious of the presence of Islam. However I get the impression that for the majority of the citizens it is the Islam that is seen as the protective shield of terrorism, not the Islam of the faithful who "maintain wholeness and proper order, as the opposite of disintegration, by accepting God's law", the Islam that is "endowed with order through obedience to God's law".<sup>3</sup> It is not a rare thing to find strong prejudices, especially at the time of writing this article when uprisings in the Middle East are becoming increasingly widespread. Perhaps it is precisely a situation like this that could deepen awareness of the need for dialogue. The deconstruction of prejudices could lead to dialogue. Of course this is a gigantic task. Proverbially prejudices have such deep roots that it is difficult even for educated and enlightened persons to realize that they are caught up in a net of stereotypes.

Dialogue, as John Paul II expressed it in his Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, has ultimately to do with the fullness/integrity of Truth<sup>4</sup>. That is the reason why pluralism, fundamentalism and relativism hang like a Damocles sword at the door of dialogue. It is easy to trivialize the problem of dialogue either by taking refuge in an irrational plurality or in an irresponsible relativism or in an emotional fundamentalism.

Whether we like it or not we cannot be blind to the phenomenon of pluralism. To ignore it or even to deny it would be unrealistic. We see how increasingly the self-understanding of a party (to say nothing of a coalition), a guild, a union and not least of a religion and culture is being challenged. The foundation pillars of our *Zeitgeist* are freedom and responsibility - they are allergic to any kind of uniformity.

2 See my note "Ein Blick aus Asien" of the September issue (2011) of the Journal *Lebendige Seelsorge*.

3 Mircea Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 7, under "Islam", 303.

4 The Latin version of *Redemptoris missio* § 56 speaks of „integritatem revelationis“.

## 1. Panikkar's Pluralism

The only thinker who in my opinion treats of pluralism in a radical but at the same time intelligible way is Raimon Panikkar.<sup>5</sup> I am aware that this sounds biased and uncritical but it is not meant that way. Most pluralists argue only with reason and defend pluralism on the level of reason alone forgetting just that element which makes what is meaningful meaningful. The fundamental difference between the pluralists and Panikkar is to be traced back to the following: Whereas the pluralists ignore the realm of the *mythos*, for Panikkar the home of a myth, any myth, is the realm of the *mythos*. Reason or *logos* is not the only form of consciousness; there is also the *mythos*.<sup>6</sup> These are two very different but interconnected forms of consciousness. The one is like the foreground where intelligibility is prominent and the other is like the background which makes the foreground intelligible. The dual metaphor - foreground and background - gives an idea of how *logos* and *mythos* work in tandem. Without the background the foreground is not intelligible and without the foreground the background remains blank and ineffective. The two complement each other.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly intelligibility, ratiocination, objectification, etc. are presupposed by the process of articulation, formulation, etc. But the realm of the *mythos* lights up, illuminates, and enlightens. In this way it makes what reason puts forward intelligible and meaningful. Intelligibility and meaningfulness, both characteristics of the *logos*, derive from the *mythos*. Whereas it is the *mythos* that makes the *logos* intelligible and significant, it is the *logos* which reveals the *mythos* and the way it works.

5 See, for example, some of his essays on Pluralism: "Pluralismus, Toleranz und Christenheit," in: *Pluralismus, Toleranz und Christenheit* (Nürnberg: Abendländliche Akademie, 1961), 117-142; „The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel. A Meditation on Non-Violence", in: *Cross Currents* XXIX:2 (1979), 197-230. Also in: H.J. Cargas (Hg.), *Invisible Harmony. Essays on Contemplation and Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 52-91); "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 227-291.

6 Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*. Cross-Cultural Studies (New Jersey: Paulist, 1979), 4: This field demands a peculiar attitude: You cannot look directly at the source of light; you turn your back to it so that you may see — not the light, but the illuminated things. Light is invisible. So too with the myth — myth here is not the object of discourse, but the expression of a *sui generis* form of consciousness."

7 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 241-243.

*Mythos* and *logos* are interrelated and they flow into each other.<sup>8</sup> When something of the *logos* is understood it enters the *mythos*. This deepens and broadens the *mythos*. The effect of this is that our understanding broadens and deepens. With that the expressions of the *logos* broaden and deepen. This in turn again broadens and deepens the *mythos*. There is, as Panikkar puts it, “a continual passage from *mythos* to *logos*, and the constant ‘re-sourcing’ of the *logos* in new *mythoi*”<sup>9</sup>

In 1979 Panikkar proposed the following theses: (a) “reason is not the whole of Logos”, (b) “Logos is not the whole of Man,” and (c) “Man is not the whole of Being.”<sup>10</sup> But our epoch appears to have fallen a prey to “panlogicism”<sup>11</sup> and ascribes to it a higher place as if everything in Reality were penetrated by the Logos alone. As a matter of fact, Reality is not totally and completely transparent. The mythic dimension is not transparent. This is not something negative. It is the dark background on which the white foreground becomes legible or the other way round. It is the mythic dimension that makes things transparent.<sup>12</sup>

Pluralism rests on a dual factor: On the one side, we have rational systems that are not compatible with other rational systems. On the other side there is no Super-System that could render the diverse rational systems compatible.<sup>13</sup> Every system has its specific perspective and its

8 Panikkar , “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, 242: “Both *mythos* und *logos* pervade everything, but they cannot live in isolation.”

9 Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 100.

10 Panikkar, “The Myth of Pluralism”, 214-215.

11 Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, 255.

12 Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”241: “It is not enough to grant condescendingly to the *mythos* a status in the lower range of the emotions and instincts. *Mythos* is not irrationality. Precisely because there is no subordinationism of the *mythos* to the *logos*, the categories of rationality and/or irrationality are not applicable to the world of the *mythos*.”

13 Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness*. Edited and introduced by Scott EasthamMary knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 121:,,If we take pluralism not as a political strategy but as a word representing the ultimate structure of reality, we shall have to overcome the assumption of a single human pattern of intelligibility.

specific "laws", its ethics and its metaphysics.<sup>14</sup> The problem begins when *our* perspective, laws, ethics and metaphysics are extrapolated into other systems. Neither knowledge nor our system is absolute. The claims of our systems are valid only within the walls of our systems, not outside these walls.<sup>15</sup>

Panikkar repeatedly reminds us that pluralism is not a system.<sup>16</sup> Pluralism is an attitude, an attitude which believes that truth is pluralistic but not plural.<sup>17</sup> Plural refers to the plurality of truths. Pluralism says truth is neither one nor two. Panikkar often employs the expressions *advaita*<sup>18</sup> and trinitarian for pluralism.<sup>19</sup> For him the expressions pluralistic, trinitarian and *advaita* are homeomorphic equivalents.<sup>20</sup>

Pluralism as attitude is aware that there is no predicate for Reality because Reality is a mystery and as such ineffable.<sup>21</sup> Reality *is* - but this *is* is an existential characteristic, not an essential one. Our efforts to describe Reality refer to mere aspects of Reality. We live, move and have our being in Reality. From within this Reality we are incapable of thematizing "be-ing". Ultimately it is be-ing that enables thematization and even the attempts to objectify.

The pluralistic attitude makes us aware that first and foremost we are incapable of knowing the whole of Reality. Our access to Reality is always *pars pro toto*. Our window [of perceiving, understanding and

14 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 248: "Be that as it may, we all operate within a given myth, in which we believe, and which is the matrix of our respective processes of intelligibility."

15 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 256.

16 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 255: "Pluralism is a human attitude, not a 'theoretical system'."

17 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 260.

18 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 250.

19 Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. Towards an Ecumenical Christophany (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, Revised and enlarged edition, 1981), 23-24, especially 24: "The Mystery towards which the religious experience of Humankind tends is neither the same nor different, neither one nor many: it is non-dualistic. It allows for *pluralism*, the modern secular word I would use to express the same issue."

20 Panikkar, „The Rules of the Game in the Religious Encounter" in: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York, N.Y./Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, rev. ed. 1999), 67.

21 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 275.

believing] is our own. In the same way the others have their own window.<sup>22</sup> Our window is our *mythos* (Panikkar) through which we perceive, understand and believe. All religions experience Reality through their respective window which is their *mythos*. This partial experience of the whole of Reality is what Panikkar calls the *pars pro toto* experience.

If this is so, have we not fallen a prey to relativism? Panikkar replies that this is relativity or relationality. Relativity refers to the beliefs of a tradition that are relative to their cosmovision where alone they have their validity and intelligibility. Relationality means they are related to a specific cosmovision.<sup>23</sup> Besides a standpoint such as this does not deny Absolute Truth which relativism does. It is Absolute Truth that reveals itself everywhere. But human receptivity is everywhere conditioned and determined by history. The historically conditioned being called Man is incapable of receiving Absolute Truth absolutely. However this being can receive Absolute Truth relatively. But seen from another angle this reception has a certain endlessness about it because Man can go ever deeper into the Mystery of the Absolute Truth. There is no limit to Man's search.

The pluralistic attitude, says Panikkar, is a critical attitude which is aware of its specific perspective and relativity.<sup>24</sup> We always come to know Reality through our window (of our Mythos) and perceive the incompatibility between our faith-world and the faith-world of the others. The validity of a faith-world has to do with the window of the respective faith-world. This is relativity: Its validity holds good only within the confines of its faith-world.<sup>25</sup>

22 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 247-248.

23 Panikkar, "Religion, Philosophy and Culture", in: *polylog:Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 1 (2000), <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>, 82: "But the cultural relativity of an intercultural discourse has thing to do with such relativism. The relativity inherent to interculturality does not question the discoveries of a culture, but neither does it absolutize them. It relativizes them, i.e. it considers them valid and legitimate within a given culture and within the parameters admitted by the latter: in a word within the encompassing myth of that culture."

24 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", 253.

25 Panikkar, "Religion, Philosophy and Culture", in: *polylog:Forum for Intercultural Philosophy* 1 (2000), <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>, 82.

The problem arises when other faith-worlds accept something that totally contradicts something from my faith-world. On the one hand I cannot accept this unconditionally. My faith-world urges me, to oppose this and to refute and eliminate the contradiction with means available in my faith-world. The other point is, that I cannot, indeed may not, absolutize my view. I may not condemn (from the perspective of my pluralistic attitude) the view of the other faith-worlds as *absolute evil*. A pluralistic attitude is never compatible with any kind of absolutism.<sup>26</sup> However it can be the case that seen from my faith window there is something which is really unacceptable but that might not be the case from the faith window of the other perspectives. Pluralism asserts itself against any and every kind of absolutism (in the field of Ethics, for example) but not with another absolutism. A pluralistic attitude searches always for some common ground with the opposing faith-world.<sup>27</sup> This is the place for dialogue and not the occasion for writing off other faith-worlds and their members.

For relativism it is not important to which religion we belong, since all religions are true. There is inherent in this stance a tendency towards uniformity which makes it impossible to take religions and their truth-claims seriously. Relativism is an “ism”, something negative. It is not aware of its irrationality because it either overlooks historical conditioning or trivializes it. But in the case of relativity it is another matter. It takes each religion, its stance and its truth-claims seriously. For it historical conditioning is a basic factor of life, on the one hand and on the other, this basic factor of life finds its due both in the karmic and in the anthropic approaches to history.<sup>28</sup>

26 Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, 253.

27 Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, 253: “Roman Christianity during the European Middle Ages held that Islam was a false religion, and heretics more harmful than ‘terrorists’ today. The church safeguarded the intimacy of human conscience so that a *bona fide* muslim or a condemned heretic could still go straight to heaven (*de internis non judicat ecclesia*) but the *bonum commune* demanded they should be persecuted or punished – like the modern prison system.”

28 Cfr F.X D’Sa, “Karmische und Anthropische Geschichte”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft* 87:3 (2003), 163-180.

Each of our windows enables a specific ethics and metaphysics. The different windows however create problems for one another because of the difference in the content and direction of their ethics and metaphysics. To put it simply: They will contradict each other. The truth-claims become thematic. It will be said that contradicting opinions cannot both be true. In all this one forgets that Reality has no predicate, it cannot have any. Furthermore the plenitude of Reality cannot be exhausted, not by one religion nor by all of them put together!<sup>29</sup>

Does this imply that we will have to tolerate every ethical system? Will this not spell chaos in our societies? From within our window it will not be possible to accept any and every ethical imperative from another window. Indeed we will be forced to oppose it.<sup>30</sup> But we should know that differing opinions are in fact the signal to begin dialogue. In dialogue we have the opportunity patiently to hone our positions regarding ethics, metaphysics and doctrines.

Clearly this does not solve the problem. But it shows what awaits a pluralistic attitude. It pleads for a solidly based tolerance. Not only our side means well but also the other. Polarization cannot be the solution but polarity.

29 Vgl. Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in: Josef Prabhu (Hg.), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1996), 252. "Pluralism is precisely the recognition that there may be several centres of intelligibility, that the world in which we live is not only a world of concepts but also of subjects as well – and subjects cannot be co-opted into objects, much less into concepts, without ceasing to be subjects."

30 Panikkar, "A Self-Critical Dialogue", in: Joseph Prabhu, *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis, 1996), 261 - 262s: "I, for one, unambiguously condemn the dropping of the atomic bombs, the nazi holocaust and the hunting of africans to bring them as slaves to America, but I meet many people whom I respect who defend similar practices as a lesser evil (Kurdistan, Rwanda, the Persian Gulf, etc.). I cannot condone slavery as an institution, and yet we have to acknowledge that for centuries 'good people', including politicians, thinkers, and saints, practically approved of slavery and defended the existence of outcasts. Cannibalism and human sacrifice may be other extreme cases. The condemnation of these examples belongs today to the common myth of our humanness. But not too long ago people whom we would call humans and even humane practiced those horrendous acts. In our times, I would include war as an example of an institution which has not (yet?) found a common mythical rejection."

If we reject this path what awaits us is terrifying. The most powerful will determine who and what is right. In that case not only will pluralism disappear but also all those who do not side with the powerful. In our own times we have seen the horrors of the Gulf-War, the occupation in Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq war, the "liberation" of Iraq, to say nothing of the tragedies in the different states in the African continent. We are witnesses of how in the name of fighting terrorism basic human rights have been and are being trampled upon. Globalization of the anti-terror campaign respects neither the specificity of cultures nor the differences among peoples. Uniform and uniformity - these are characteristics of a dictatorship. Paradoxically, of all the political movements it is the champions of democracy that have been supporting dictators in South America and the Middle East!

We stand now at the parting of the ways: We have to choose between the dialogue of cultures and the dictatorship of uniformity. The latter is simpler and without stress (for the followers) because all the complexities and dilemmas of pluralism and tolerance will be simply eliminated. The former is exhausting and unsure but offers the possibility that we take the cultures and their contributions seriously. This in the long run would reduce the danger of war and increase the possibility of peace. Here we would have the opportunity to learn to differentiate between the important and the urgent, between the optimum and the maximum and between dialogue and discussion.

Discussion, for example, is part of dialogue but dialogue is more than discussion. Reason (usually) guides and leads a discussion. What goes against reason becomes a topic for discussion even when the way reason is differently reasonable in a different culture. Principally discussion aims at clarity and elimination of misunderstanding. We constantly understand (or misunderstand) the other from our point of view. This demands discussion and clarification. Discussion therefore is an important, yes, even indispensable component of dialogue.<sup>31</sup>

---

31 Panikkar, "The Rhetoric of the Dialogue", in: *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, (New York, N.Y./Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, rev. ed. 1999), 10: "The aim of the intrareligious dialogue is understanding. It is not to win over the other or to come to a total agreement or a universal religion

## 2. The Dialogue of Cultures

Real dialogue is built on a commonality, a common myth, that is silently taken for granted but which is not part of the discussion. An open dialogue presupposes openness. That means, the commonality under which the dialogue partners stand, opens them up to possibilities of realizing that commonality. Dialogue is the ambience in which the commonality begins to take concrete shape. This happens when the dialogue partners challenge each other. Such challenges reveal new possibilities of encounter and mutual understanding.<sup>32</sup>

Real dialogue, for Panikkar, begins with “dialogical dialogue”.<sup>33</sup> He explains the “dialogical” aspect of this kind of dialogue as the penetration of the Logos, that takes one beyond the Logos and in this way participates in the Mythos of the dialogue-partner. Hence in such a dialogue neither reason nor Logos are decisive but the Mythos. The realm of the Mythos unites and enlightens and in this manner makes something meaningful. However it is not the realm that thematizes because according to its disposition it functions like background and horizon: The background on which the foreground stands out and the horizon which keeps on receding the more one approaches it.

The path to the Mythos of another religion is openness: Openness not only to what the religion says but more especially to what it hints at whenever it says something. This kind of simultaneous listening becomes much easier when the dialogue partner gives witness to his/her own religious experience.<sup>34</sup> The quintessence of dialogue consists in giving witness. The language of witness is of a special kind which goes beyond the language of information. It “touches” and “transforms” and enables entry into the religious world of the other. It transforms, i.e. trans-forms in that it opens up another world of experience, as if the listener would receive another form, another Gestalt. Corresponding to how deeply one has entered into the world of the other, one understands the “Thou” of other cultures.

32 R. Panikkar, “Transforming Christian Mission into Dialogue”, *Interculture* 19 (October-December 1987), 25.

33 Panikkar, “Witness and Dialogue”, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 242-245.

34 Panikkar, “Witness and Diaogue”, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 232-256.

The language of information is informative, i.e., descriptive. One has to understand it literally, word for word. The more precise such language is, the more appropriate it will be for the purpose it is meant to serve. Its hallmark is verification or falsification, as the case may be. The language of transformation through giving witness however is different. A language like this employs the language of metaphor which more than information projects a world.<sup>35</sup> To understand the world means discovering oneself in the world-metaphor. Openness is the condition of possibility for such understanding. This is the difference between information and understanding.

Such understanding is more than an intellectual affair. It is holistic understanding which distinguishes itself thoroughly from information. Whereas information is linked with the world of perception, understanding has to do with the world of person without giving up the world of perception.<sup>36</sup> Even when information presupposes the mythic background this presupposition is much more intensive in the case of understanding. Here Mythos comes into its own because understanding refers to perceiving the foreground on the mythic background. One comes in touch with the Mythos in authentic understanding. And Mythos as we said is the realm of agreement and understanding.

Naturally perception and understanding are not everything. There is also the realm of faith, that is, the realm of meaning in life. Understanding and faith are related though they are very different. They are related because they are significantly connected to the Mythos. They are different because each of them has a different goal. Understanding has the goal of entering into the world of the other but faith has to do with meaning in life. However the two goals can be distinguished but not separated.

---

35 Cfr. F.X. D'Sa, "Re-Searching the Divine. The World of Symbol and the Language of Metaphor", in: Job Kozhamthadam (Hg.), *Interrelations and Interpretation. Philosophical Reflections on Science, Religion and Hermeneutics in Honour of Richard De Smet, S.J. and Jean de Marneffe, S.J.* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1997), 141-173.

36 Cfr. F.X. D'Sa, „Die verschiedenen Glaubenswelten der Religionen am Beispiel von Christentum und Hinduismus”, in: Bernhard Nitsche (Hg.), *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive*, 68-77.

Both are important for the dialogue of religions. John Paul II states in *Redemptoris Missio* 55: „Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission.”

Dialogue is the path of mutual understanding among religions. Dialogical dialogue makes possible a view of the interior of a religion as it were. The interior view and coming in touch with the faith-world of the dialogue partner evoke and effect a good many things in those who are engaged in dialogue. For one thing their eyes are opened to a world which they had perceived only from the outside as it were. For another they experience a faith-world (the world of meaning in life) from a completely different angle. Earlier they were in danger of universalizing their faith-world; they now realize how valid the faith-world of the dialogue partners is, at least in as much they experienced it from the inside with the help of the witness of the others. And thirdly they realize how shallow their own faith-expressions are or how prosaic the traditional interpretations of their faith now sound.

It is in the context of dialogical dialogue that Panikkar introduces his *diatopical hermeneutics*, a contribution that has been almost totally neglected or overlooked or ignored by hermeneuticians. Panikkar says that this approach tries to overcome “the gap existing between two human *topoi*, ‘places’ of understanding and self-understanding, between two - or more - cultures that have not developed their patterns of intelligibility or their basic assumptions out of a common historical or thorough mutual influence.”<sup>37</sup>

I just present some of Panikkar’s statements dealing with diatopical hermeneutics. At the risk of being unintelligible I quote only his five Sûtras on hermeneutics in order to somewhat complete his hermeneutical world<sup>38</sup>:

- 
- 37 Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (New Jersey: Paulist, 1979), 9.
- 38 Panikkar, “The Texture of a Text: In Response to P. Ricoeur”, *Point of Contact* (April-May 1978, New York), Vol II, 57-62: “(1) *A text is word, crystallized in matter, space, time and man.* This first sutra(thread) links text with Man. (2) *A text says.* This second sutra links text with word. (3) *A text says what it means.* This third sutra links text with meaning. (4) *A text means whatever meaning can be extracted from it.* This fourth sutra links text with present human life. (5) *The meaning of a text emerges from an ever elusive horizon.* This fifth sutra links text with mythos.”

1. "Diatopical hermeneutics stands for the thematic consideration of understanding the other without assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding and understanding as I have."<sup>39</sup>
2. "Diatopical hermeneutics is not objectifiable, because it considers the other an equally original source of understanding. In other words, Man's self-understanding belongs not only to what Man thinks of himself, but to what Man is."<sup>40</sup>
3. "The method in this third moment is a peculiar dialogical dialogue, the dia-logos piercing the logos in order to reach that dialogical, trans-logical realm of the heart (according to most traditions), allowing for the emergence of a myth in which we may commune, and which will ultimately allow under-standing (standing under the same horizon of intelligibility)."<sup>41</sup>

Encounter with the worlds of faith has serious consequences both for the believers themselves as well as for their community. The believers will presumably have a hard time with the standardized understanding of their faith. Faith is an experience and belief is its linguistic expression.<sup>42</sup> Between them is a great distance. Whereas faith experience is trans-historical, belief is historically conditioned. Any kind of revision or new interpretation is suspect and becomes the occasion for serious debates and even conflicts in the larger community. It will be a long time till increasingly more persons undergo such an interreligious experience.

It may be true that generally speaking the diverse cultures of India have lived with one another in peace. But the use of the word peace in this context must give us pause to think.<sup>43</sup> The cultures have lived in peace means that they have lived not with one another but side by side like oil and water. As always diversity has at least two faces: One with potentiality for conflict and the other with potentiality for peace. This is

39 Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 9.

40 Ibid. 9-10.

41 Ibid. 9.

42 Panikkar, „Faith and Belief: A Multireligious Experience”, 55.

43 Panikkar, *Cultural Disarmament The Way to Peace* (Louisville, Ky. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995).

especially true in the case of the diversity of cultures and religions. People seem to be more aware of the potential for conflict than of the potential for peace. Even an impressionistic glance into history would be enough to confirm this suspicion.

### **3. A Pedagogy of Dialogue**

In this context the document *Dialogue and Proclamation* issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue needs to be mentioned.<sup>44</sup> Among other things it has creatively summarized areas of dialogue where every person can discover where she can meaningfully contribute.

First we have the *dialogue of life*. Life is a gift; no one can suggest that life is of their making. The gift of life can bring people together to share what life and death mean to them. Whatever be our beliefs about life and death, there is in this world the whole concern with others about living, living well, living happily, living justly, living in a way that enhances health, safety, service and togetherness. Life means not just the bold and the beautiful but also and especially children and young mothers. Life also refers to the senior citizens and not least the sick and the dying. These are areas of concern for all, irrespective of religion and culture. We need human communities where we can share life at different levels. *Dialogue and Proclamation* rightly points out that this is the way mutual trust is born. We can add that this is the place where trust has to be cultivated. Trust is the foundation of all healthy relationships and friendship is its fruit. The phrase dialogue of life means different things to members of different communities. This is not a problem but an opportunity. Healthy and happy communities can more easily get rid of prejudices and cultivate openness to religions and cultures.

Then there is the *dialogue of common concerns*. A community that cares for its members commits itself to solving common problems and pursuing common goals. Here the political goals of citizens will have priority. Not concentrating so much on individual welfare exclusively

---

44 *Dialogue and Proclamation*. Joint Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, Rome, 19 May 1991; OR. 21 June, 1991.

but on those aspects that deepen the sense of community and solidarity. This area is called dialogue because people will have to dialogue with one another to come to an agreement as to which concerns have to be addressed and what kind of priority they should have.

Thirdly, we have the *dialogue of experts*. Here the main task of experts is to eliminate misunderstandings and promote positive understanding through meaningful clarifications. Experts here are taken to be persons of integrity who (like the *sthitaprajñas* of the Bhagavadgita, ch. 2) have no personal axe to grind but whose real concern is the welfare of all. In this regard the most dangerous people however would be experts who are interested in feathering the nest of their own communities. They could be aptly described as wolves in sheep's clothing.

More positively, experts having real concern to bring out the best in the religion of the dialoguing community will be ideally suited for the purpose of bridge-building. Experts from the European model of "Science of Religion" (*Religionswissenschaft*) will not be suitable candidates because (except in rare cases) the approach is intellectual, not experiential. Realistically (but sadly) there are few who are qualified for this task.

Finally we have the *dialogue of spiritual exchange*. This is Panikkar's dialogical dialogue, where witnessing is of the essence. This stage presupposes a different understanding of dialogue where listening to the witness of the dialoging partners opens them up to the core of the witnessing religion. This is no more the stage of information. Indeed one could safely call it the state of transformation. The kind of witness envisioned here transforms the listeners. The sharing and witnessing that take place at this stage go much beyond the informative level in the direction of the personal and mystical dimension. Dialogue is not about small talk, not even God-talk. It is about listening and like Mary keeping all this pondering in our heart.

### **A Concluding Word**

Panikkar's understanding of and approach to the phenomenon of pluralism is novel and illuminating. This derives from the fact that for Panikkar the roots of pluralism are in the Mythos, not only in the Logos.

Mythos alone is dumb. It needs the Logos to speak out on its behalf. This sets Panikkar apart from the “common sense” pluralists. For him Logos alone has no meaning, it is meaningless. It needs the Mythos to make sense, to become meaningful. When pluralism neglects the Mythos and tries to justify itself rationally it builds on sand, the sand of transience. But transience by itself cannot make sense. Ultimately meaning, ultimate meaning, is born in the magma of the Mythos.

It is fitting that I summarize this essay with a quotation from Panikkar: “Pluralism is precisely the recognition that there may be several centres of intelligibility, that the world in which we live is not only a world of concepts but also of subjects as well – and subjects cannot be co-opted into objects, much less into concepts, without ceasing to be subjects.”<sup>45</sup>

**Institute for the Study of Religion**

Pune 411014

francis.x.dsa@gmail.com

---

45 Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, 252.

# **The World is Charged with the Grandeur of God<sup>1</sup>**

## **The Relevance of Raimon Panikkar's Symbol Approach**

**Clemens Mendonca**

Dr. Clemens Mendonca explores the foundations of Panikkar's world-view. The cosmos, the human and the divine are interconnected dimensions of the totality of reality; one cannot be understood without the other. They form a trinitarian unity. Everything perceptible in the world is ultimately a symbol of this cosmotheandric unity. This makes reality sacred; the world becomes thereby a sacrament of the Divine, the earth is loved as the mother. Such an ecosophy is the antidote to the disruptive inroads of modern technocracy. Sr. Dr. Clemens Mendonca is the Executive Director of the Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune, and she is in charge of the FABC's desk for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs.

### **1. Introduction**

Any experience of beauty, friendship, joy, the smile of a baby, the beauty of a landscape etc. are moments in our lives where our hearts begin to burn. These we cherish because we experience something that cannot be adequately put into words. Such experiences are symbolic experiences. In fact we live and move in a world of symbols. Obviously, our personal/intimate language is symbolic and our religious experiences are expressed in metaphors. They open us up to another horizon of our being. We encounter the world/reality through our own mythical

---

<sup>1</sup> See Gerald Manley Hopkins, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God" from the poem "God's Grandeur", (1844-1889).

spectacles and express it in a language we are at home with i.e., from our specific world. But the *expression* is not the *experience*, though they are intimately connected with each other.

The modern tendency however is to treat this world as an object or a collection of objects also called resources. The basic dilemma that we face today is the dichotomy between life and reality. Technology is gaining control over all spheres of our life and of our world. Consequently our approach to reality is gradually becoming possessive and our attitude to life is one that instrumentalizes every one and every thing. We are losing touch with the earth and its elements. We fail to delve deeper into what we see, hear and touch in this world. The world has become for us an object; trees are viewed as wood, water as H<sub>2</sub>O, animals for profit or entertainment in a zoo; human beings are mere entities and God is no more a mystery but either an empty word in perhaps a meaningless ritual or one whom we pester to supply our needs and wants. Instead of experiencing the world symbolically (*sym-ballein* – that which brings together, that which unites) we are experiencing it more and more diabolically (*dia-ballein* - that which puts asunder, that which divides).<sup>2</sup>

It is here that the contribution of the philosopher-theologian-mystic Raimon Panikkar becomes significant. His ontological understanding of symbol shows the way to a holistic approach to reality. The merit of Panikkar's contribution consists in the fact that his way of looking at symbol is addressed not primarily to Christians or even to believers but simply to people of good-will, an approach that is in keeping with the signs of our modern age.

Panikkar was a scientist, philosopher and theologian. In him several traditions met: the western tradition both Christian and Secular and the Indian tradition, both Hindu and Buddhist. His voluminous writings disclose that he had been grappling throughout his life with the problem of the fragmentation of reality and life, of the knower and the known. Such fragmentation manifests itself in the predicament we face today:

---

2 Clemens Mendonca, *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue: Interreligious Education in India*, The Relevance of Raimon Panikkar's Intercultural Challenge, LIT Verlag, Muenster, 2002, 2.

consumerism, ecological imbalance, social, economic, political and religious injustices, human rights abuses, oppressive systems etc. Another major symptom of this fragmentation is dichotomy between spirit and matter, science and religion, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology. We suffer alienation at three levels: The Divine, the Cosmic and the Human.

Panikkar's fascination with the Trinity led him to comprehend this problem at its depth. Not surprisingly, the Trinity became the foundation of Panikkar's vision. It is from here that he developed his theological and philosophical enterprises. For him the Trinity is radically relational, organic, and holistic. He calls it fundamental unity in radical relativity.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A Holistic Vision of Reality

According to Panikkar there is an *existential force* that holds the whole of humankind together despite all other dividing factors. This is that same force that holds the entire universe together. He calls this force the *Harmony of Reality*.<sup>4</sup> Thus for example, when we look around our world we do not just see objects thrown out here and there. What we see is something holistic, interconnected and interrelated. We speak of a tree but a tree does not exist all by itself. There is the earth that holds it, the sun that warms it, the air, the minerals, the water and the surroundings etc. that contribute to its being. There is a collaboration between these natural elements that help in bringing forth and maintaining this tree! Moreover, there is a relationship between a human being and the tree because it is the human being that *discovers* the tree. The tree, the human being, the earth, the air and the atmosphere, the sky, the sun, etc. are all part of what we see and experience, part of one continuum called reality. Finally the tree has *something more* than merely what meets the eye.

---

3 Cf., Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, ORBIS Books, New York, 1973, xv.

4 R. Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?," in: *Inter-Culture*, Volume XXIII, Number 3, Summer (1990)/Issue # 108 Montreal, 45-78

There is something mysterious in it, so that none of us can assert that we know all about the tree.<sup>5</sup>

To put it concretely, Panikkar points out that reality is all that *is* and all that *is*, is interrelated, and in this interrelationship he sees a trinitarian principle. First of all there is the material *world* (cosmos, universe) we live in and without which we cannot *be*. This world is the background of our existence. Secondly, there are the *humans*, who inhabit this world, who are conscious of their own existence and the existence of the world around them. Thirdly, there is a depth-dimension in the world and in us which lends a certain endlessness to both. The world can be objectified without coming to an end and the human being can objectify endlessly. This is so because there is an all-pervading *Mystery* present in the universe which grasps us, before which we stand in awe and which satiates our thirst for Meaning. There exists nothing outside these three fundamental invariants.<sup>6</sup> None can make sense all by itself. None is independent of the other. The world is meaningless without the humans and the humans cannot exist without the world. God cannot be known and experienced without humans and the world. There is an existential link, an ontological relationship between these three: God, World and Man.<sup>7</sup> If something goes wrong with one, all three are affected because they are mutually interdependent and irreducible to the others.<sup>8</sup> To put it differently, our experience of reality encompasses three dimensions: material or cosmic, human or conscious and depth or divine.

5 Clemens Mendonca, *Dynamics of Symbol and Dialogue*, 10-11.

6 Raimon Panikkar, "The Cosmotheandric Intuition," in: *Jeevadhara* XIV 79 (1984), 27-35, 27-28.

7 Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 1982, footnote 1, ix Panikkar employs the word Man with a capital letter for 'human being'. In this usage Man refers to human being in its totality. Such an expression is in no way a language of sexism and thus should not be taken as antifeminist. Panikkar himself says the following: "Two reasons compel me to write Man with a capital letter: a) to indicate that it means the human being in its totality and thus includes the male and the female; b) to imply that Man is an irreducible reality standing side by side- with all the necessary ontological distinctions- with God and the world."

8 Cf., Raimon Panikkar, The Cosmotheandric Intuition, *Jeevadhara* XIV 79, 29-30.

The cosmic dimension is the realm wherein our senses are active. We see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. This is the dimension of reality which *connects everything with every thing*. It is the dimension of *relationship* and is quantifiable, perceivable and objectifiable.

The human dimension is the world of consciousness. It is a world of persons, of love and understanding. This dimension of reality *discovers* the interconnection between things. If all things are related in and through the cosmic dimension, it is the human dimension that *discovers* these relationships.

The depth or divine dimension is the world of faith. Reality has something *more* than humans can comprehend. The more we know about a thing or person the more remains to be known. Knowing means being *open* to knowing something more and implies *inexhaustibility*. We cannot however know anything exhaustively nor can anything be known exhaustively. Panikkar argues: "To place limits on being - *qua* being - is to destroy it." This is because every being has an open-ended character as part of its very nature. This open-endedness is the *mystery* dimension, a dimension of the unknown and the unknowable.<sup>10</sup>

To sum up, reality is the integration of three dimensions (cosmic, human and divine). These three dimensions form one community because they interpenetrate one another. Each dimension is unique and irreducible to the others. Hence there are no individual beings disconnected from one another. Panikkar calls this unitary experience of reality the *Cosmotheandric experience*. 'God, World and Man' as he aptly puts it, are not and cannot be three separate entities but are three common invariants that form one fundamental unity in radical relativity.<sup>11</sup> With this background we shall try to understand what Panikkar means by symbol and why it is so important for us today.

9 Raimon Panikkar, "Colligite Fragmenta: For an Integration of Reality," in: F. A. Eigo, (Ed.), *From Alienation to At-one-ness*, Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University, The Villanova University Press, 1977, 19-91, 75.

10 Raimon Panikkar, The Cosmotheandric Intuition, *Jeevadharma* XIV 79, 29-30.

11 Ibid. 27-28.

### 3. Symbol and Sign

If reality means all that there is, then all that there is, is experienced symbolically. According to Panikkar “all-that-there-is”, is ‘there’ precisely because it appears ‘there’ (as what there-is). This real appearance is the symbol.”<sup>12</sup> Again, “The symbol IS the reality, as symbol. A reality that is not symbolized in a symbol would not be there; in fact it would not even *be*. In this sense the symbol at once *conceals and reveals* the reality of which the symbol is symbol.”<sup>13</sup>

What Panikkar means here is that a symbol is a peculiar mode of consciousness in which reality manifests itself. It is the dimension of space and time, energy and matter that *points to* and makes present a deeper reality. In other words what we experience through the symbol is that which it *symbolizes*, that is, it makes present the symbolized reality. We speak of this experience in symbolic language. Symbol, the symbolized reality and the symbolic language refer to *appearance of the symbol, experience of the symbolized reality* and the expression of this experience.

Besides, a symbol is a unifier; it brings the *three worlds* together: the cosmic, the human and the divine. A symbol needs a symbolizer, the human person because the symbolizer is the one who *discovers* symbols, not the one who creates them. In the absence of the symbolizer there are no symbols. The symbolizer is able to discover the symbolic difference. The symbolizer is also the *pontifex*, the bridge-builder. A symbol takes us to the source (the symbolized reality).

At the outset we need to clarify some misunderstanding regarding the use of the word ‘symbol’. Generally we say a flag is the symbol of a nation. Flag and nation are two different things brought together (artificially) by a common understanding and are given meaning in a particular situation. We need *information/mediation* about one in order to *understand* the other. According to Panikkar this is not a symbol but an *epistemic sign or “epistemic reality.”*<sup>14</sup> An epistemic sign requires

12 R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Bangalore, ATC, 1983, 7.

13 Raimon Panikkar, “Seed-Thoughts in Cross-Cultural Studies,” in: *Monchanin VIII* 50(1975) 1-73, 19. Italics are mine.

14 Ibid. 18.

mediation. It “points toward the thing for which it *acts* as a sign. It belongs to the epistemically real.”<sup>15</sup> Thus for example when we destroy a sign (e.g. flag) we do not destroy that which it signifies although it is an act of disrespect to the thing pointed. An *epistemic sign* is not a symbol and therefore does not symbolize, that is, does not make present the symbolized reality.

But in the case of a symbol it is different. If we destroy a symbol we destroy that which it points out to – the symbolized reality along with it. “If you kill the one, the symbol, you also kill the other, the symbolized thing. Symbols can die in the consciousness of the people.”<sup>16</sup> This is because a real symbol is *self expressive*. It does not require an interpretation. When a symbol requires interpretation then it has ceased to be a symbol.

A symbol evokes immediate and first hand experience of reality. It is also an originary and universal experience of reality. Panikkar remarks: “The symbol is always immediate, non-mediated. The symbol is symbol precisely because it does not require mediation. There is no possible hermeneutics of a symbol. The symbol is symbol because it symbolizes - not because it ‘hermeneuticizes’ (i.e., because it gives an interpretation of itself). If we need an interpretation, a mediation, in order that the symbol symbolizes, this other element by which we interpret the symbol would be the real symbol.”<sup>17</sup>

A symbol is transparent because it contains the reality in itself. E.g. a *smile* is an expression of *joy*. Joy is pressed out as it were through the smile. Joy cannot be seen except through its *symbol* the smile but the smile is not the joy and joy is not the smile though one cannot be without the other.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the human *body* is the symbol of the *person*. We cannot separate the body from the person and the person can only be expressed through the symbol the *body*. A smile does not stop at the

15 Ibid., 18. Italics are mine.

16 Ibid. 21.

17 Raimon Panikkar, “A Self-Critical Dialogue,” in: Joseph Prabhu (Ed.), *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, 1996, 227-291, 235.

18 The example of smile as a symbol is from Francis X. D’Sa

smile nor does the body stop at the body, but they lead us to participation in the symbolized reality i.e. joy and person respectively.

### ***3.1 Symbol and the Symbolized Reality are neither Identical nor Separable***

As seen in the examples of smile/joy and body/person symbol and the symbolized reality are neither identical nor separable. The relationship between the symbol and that which it symbolizes is unique and irreducible. Panikkar aptly points out that: “A symbol is not a symbol of another (‘thing’), but of itself, in the sense of the subjective genitive. A symbol is the symbol of that which *is* precisely (symbolized) in the symbol, and which, thus, does not exist without its symbol. A symbol *is* nothing but the symbol of that which appears in and as the symbol.”<sup>19</sup>

This means that a symbol *reveals* its own self. It is the appearance or the manifestation of its own self: “A symbol carries within itself its own revelation: the symbolized thing can only BE in the symbol.”<sup>20</sup> The revelation that it unveils is housed within itself. The symbol is the embodiment (*em-body-ment*) of the symbolized reality. That is why we say a symbol is the face of the real. A simple example: When we encounter a friend we recognize the person of this friend.<sup>21</sup>

### ***3.2 Symbol is the meeting point of myth and logos***

For Panikkar a symbol is an “ontomythical reality”<sup>22</sup> because it belongs to the realm of both the ontological and the mythical. A symbol cannot be the product of logos. It is not subject to analysis and verification. It is on the level of experience, and experience cannot be analyzed with our logical arguments. But to speak about it we need the help of logos. Again, a symbolic experience is not through reasoning but through an awareness that is innate and immediate to our very being (ontological). This immediate awareness of being (conscious) of the symbolic nature of the world is an existential reality i.e. part and parcel

19 R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 6.

20 R. Panikkar, Seed-Thoughts in *Cross-Cultural Studies*, 18.

21 Ibid. 18.

22 R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 6.

of our being-in-the-world experience (an ontological and mythical reality).

Symbol is the meeting point of *myth* and *logos*. Panikkar's argument here is worth noting: "Myth and logos meet in the symbol. No man can live without symbols. The symbol is the true appearance of reality; it is the form in which, in each case, reality discloses itself to our consciousness, or rather, it is that particular consciousness of reality. It is in the symbol that the real appears to us. It is not reality (which never exists naked, as it were) but its manifestation, its revelation. The symbol is not another 'thing', but the epiphany of that 'thing' which is not without some symbol - because ultimately Being itself is the final symbol. Any real symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolized 'thing' and the consciousness of it."<sup>23</sup>

#### **4. The Relevance of Symbol-Approach for our Times**

In Panikkar's view technocracy has "practically penetrated the four directions of the earth. We may have to surmount or dominate it, but we cannot ignore its ubiquity. May be it is destined to become the unique culture which will replace all others; but this does not mean that it is a super-culture encompassing all others."<sup>24</sup> In addition, science and technology are gradually reducing the humans merely to their mental powers, to the realm of the *logos*. Further, they thrive on the perspective of 'acceleration' i.e., ultimately it is the machine that modifies time, speeds up a particle, and accelerates a piece of lead. In other words a machine has the power to condense time. Such a reduction of time to mere linear succession kills the human spirit, devalues human uniqueness and makes of them mere temporal beings. In simple words 'Man and Machine' have become a new entity in the contemporary world. Love, joy, beauty, friendship, loyalty etc. are unique and non-transferable and are values of 'intemporality'. But the very consciousness of time destroys their 'intemporality'.<sup>25</sup>

23 R. Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, ix.

24 Raimon Panikkar - Religion, Philosophy and Culture, 92, <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>

25 R. Panikkar, "Present-Day University Education and World Cultures," in: *Asian Cultural Studies "Religion Consciousness and Modern World"*, ed. M. Uozumi and M. Kasai, Mitaka (Special Issue), 4 (1993), 187-198., 190-192.

The need of the hour is to rediscover the intrinsic, ontological relationship between *God, Man and World*. Panikkar points out: "Modern Man has killed an isolated and insular God; contemporary Earth is killing a merciless and rapacious Man, and the gods seem to have deserted both Man and Cosmos. But having touched bottom, we perceive signs of Resurrection. At the root of the ecological sensibility there is a mystical strain, and at the bottom of Man's self-understanding is a need for the infinite and non-understandable. At the very heart of the divine is an urge for time, space and Man."<sup>26</sup>

#### **4.1 Developing a Sensitivity to the Symbolic Dimension of the World**

We are aware that our society is infested with oppressive systems. The traditional Hindu way of expressing it would be 'the world is in bondage'. Bondage is not in us but we are in bondage.<sup>27</sup> This bondage has taken concrete shape in and around us through structures and systems that divide and destroy both humans and the world. These systems thrive like parasites devouring the very sap of our society and their effects are spread out in all spheres of our lives: social, cultural, religious, economic, political, national and international relationships etc. These evils are experienced by all, religious and secular traditions because they (the oppressive systems) have become part and parcel of our way of being and understanding.

Yet, in the midst of all these struggles humans also experience a longing for peace and harmony, for justice and equality. There are so many movements to this effect. What unites *all people of good will* today is a common quest: the quest for a *healthy world* – a healthy environment; the quest for unity in the *human family* beyond race, colour, caste, religion, gender, politics, nations and continents; and the quest

26 Raimon Panikkar, *Colligite Fragmenta*, 91.

27 Cf., Francis X. D'Sa, "A New Understanding of the Bhagavadgita: Trinitarian Evil," in: *Evil and the Response of World Religions*, William Cenker (Ed.), Paragon House St. Paul, Minnesota, 1997, 142-154; Cf., also Francis X. D'Sa, "Trinitarian Evil - The Bhagavadgita's Understanding of Evil," in: *Dialogue & Alliance* VIII 2 (1994), 12-25; Francis X. D'Sa, "Karma: Work for Liberation and Means of Bondage - Towards a Hindu Theology of Work," in: *Jeevadhara, A Journal of Christian Interpretation* XIII 75 (1983) 196-212.

for *meaning in life*. These are the living symbols of our time and culture and we need to enhance them. The world is the primary symbol and that is why a symbolic approach to the *world* is our topmost priority today.

Our main task then is to develop *sensitivity* to the symbolic dimension of the world. Sensitivity brings us an awareness of the situation. The bondage that we experience is not an individual affair but has universal repercussions. Therefore not only individual salvation but the salvation of the whole Cosmos is our concern because we are part of the Whole. A new order of relationship/interrelationship of peace and harmony has to gradually set in through this process of awareness. But in order to arrive at this we need a metamorphosis of our whole mentality. We need a fundamental mutation in our thinking. The fragmentation and the dichotomies that we are faced with cannot just be wished away by mere study, critique or reformation. In the words of Panikkar, "transformation is the only answer" because we go beyond the realm of the mind i.e., not only a change of the mind but also the overcoming of the mental.<sup>28</sup> F. X. D'Sa calls such a state *sacra-mentality*.<sup>29</sup>

*Sacra-mentality* overcomes the dichotomy between the *sacred* and the *secular* and views the world as a living organism. Such an attitude turns this universe into a home. The world is looked upon as a pointer to the Supreme Reality; it is the Body (the symbol), the house where the Divine (the symbolized reality) dwells and manifests itself in multidimensional ways. But in order to experience 'what is going on' behind what is happening we need to go beyond our physical sight. We need *insight* to be sensitive to the symbolic dimension of the world. That our world is far from this ideal is undisputed.

Developing sensitivity to the symbolic dimension of the world has three important implications: sensitivity *in* the symbolizer (the humans); sensitivity *to* the symbol (the world); and finally sensitivity *for* the symbolized reality (the Mystery). The whole process is part of the world

28 Colloquium with Raimond Panikkar, 1999.

29 Cf., Francis X. D'Sa, "Sacramentum Mundi", in: *The World As Sacrament*, Vol 1, Francis X. D'Sa, Isaac Padinjarekuttu, Jacob Parapally (Eds.), Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, Pune, 1998, 239-287.

of symbols. Awareness of the symbolic dimension of the world is an experience of wholeness. But holistic experience is not a product of mere reasoning, although reasoning through reflection deepens up our convictions. An experience of the working of these convictions belongs to the realm of the *mythos*.

#### **4.2 Meeting of Cultures and Religions**

Symbol is a bridge-builder. The different religious traditions stress different aspects of reality because of their specific mythoi and cultural settings. Each has a specific symbolic approach to reality. Religion is a symbolic world and consequently the language of religion is symbolic. Hence our approach to a religious encounter has to be in this line. Symbolic language is the medium for dialogue. The awareness of the nature of cosmotheandric reality could be our guide here.

Panikkar reminds us that religions are like two different languages that express all that they want to express in their own unique way. Or again they are like two life-styles that enrich human life. Each is an expression of its own myth, a perspective of the world, a way of being and existing in the world. Hence each has this quality of complementing and correcting the other so that they can learn to understand one another.<sup>30</sup> Consequently there is a need to come together in mutual trust and understanding.

Dialogue in Panikkar's perspective consists in witnessing to one's own faith-experience and also sharing this experience with believers of other faith-traditions. Such witnessing and sharing takes place with the help of the world of symbols and the language of metaphors. Symbol and metaphor are at home primarily in the realm of the *mythos* and only secondarily in the realm of the *logos*. Accordingly, what is stressed by Panikkar is a genuine encounter of religions where people of good will are open and help each other to share in their respective *mythos*.

30 R. Panikkar, In Christ There Is Neither Hindu Nor Christian: Perspectives on Hindu-Christian dialogue, 487; Cf., R. Panikkar, "Prolegomena to the problem of universality of the Church," in: *Unique and Universal*, Fundamental Problems of an Indian Theology, ed. J. B. Chethimattam, Dharmaram College, Bangalore, 1972, 155-164; Cf. R. Panikkar, "Action and Contemplation as Categories of Religious Understanding," in: *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, New Rochelle, XXX 2 (1973), 75-81.

### 4.3 Working for Common Concerns

Sensitivity to the symbolic dimension of the world opens us up to the worlds of others. But it should not stop here. All religious and secular traditions need to do some soul-searching. All traditions have the responsibility (a) of criticizing, opposing and taking a clear stand against unjust systems that prevail in our world and (b) of inspiring the people to reach their human/communitarian destiny. These are our common concerns today.

Networking is a praxis-oriented test of dialogue. The question is *not* to which religious tradition I belong but what inspiration my tradition *can* give to shoulder the responsibility of bringing about justice, peace, and healing. For this we need to take other religious traditions seriously and develop familiarity or friendship with them. So far religious traditions have lived like strangers and quite often even as enemies forgetting that diverse religious traditions are meant to reveal the different perspectives of the *One Ultimate Mystery*.

### 5. Conclusion

There is a need to retrieve the sense of the *sacredness of the earth*. In their own way religions claim that the world is the origin, the seat of life of all beings and the manifestation of God's presence. It means that the earth is more than mere matter, more than the deliverer of raw-materials. Panikkar calls this ecosophy. Ecosophy evokes a holistic vision of reality. It is the way we go about dealing with nature. It is *listening to the wisdom of the earth itself*. In Panikkar's cosmotheandric intuition, the humans are also the hearers of the wisdom of the earth; they are the sages (*Weisen*) of the earth. Such wisdom can dawn on humans only when they become *aware* that they are part and parcel of this earth, they are in, of, with and also above the earth. Humans are not mere nature. They need to realize that the universe is their *third body*; the first body being one's own human body and the second, the human family. Humans need to go about this earth as they would go about with their own body. If the earth is our body, then we are its soul.<sup>31</sup>

The discovery that 'the world is the primary symbol' has to become part and parcel of our consciousness. Our experience of reality when it

---

31 Raimon Panikkar, "Ökosophie, oder: der kosmotheandrische Umgang mit der Natur," in: Hans Kessler (Hrsg.), *Ökologisches Weltethos im Dialog der Kulturen und Religionen*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1996, 58-66, 64.

is not superficial should make us come in touch with the real – the level of faith, the level of meaningfulness. In other words humans need to change their attitude and approach to life. Only then the gulf of suspicion can be bridged between cultures, religions and people through mutual understanding. According to Nicholas D. Kristof “Religious people and secular people alike do fantastic work on humanitarian issues — but they often don’t work together because of mutual suspicions. If we could bridge this *God gulf*, we would make far more progress on the world’s ills.”<sup>32</sup> Besides, as Panikkar rightly asserts: “In the modern world I believe that only the mystics will survive. The rest will be crushed by the system if they rebel, or will suffocate within the system if they seek refuge in it.”<sup>33</sup> Panikkar’s symbol-approach demands a *metanoia* i.e., a *meta-noein*, a going beyond *noein*, beyond thought and logos to an awareness that is the ground and background of all *noein*, where symbol and symbolic experience are rooted and founded.

### **Institute for the Study of Religion**

Pune 411014

clemisrclemens19@gmail.com

- 32 Nicholas D. Kristof, “Evangelicals without Blowhards”, Sunday Review, New York Times, July 30, 2011: [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/opinion/sunday/kristof-evangelicals-without-blowhards.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/31/opinion/sunday/kristof-evangelicals-without-blowhards.html?_r=1&hp)
- 33. Raimon Panikkar “The Dawn of Christianess”. Cross Currents.FindArticles.com. 01 Aug, 2011. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m2096/is\\_2000\\_Spring-Summer/ai\\_63300906/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2096/is_2000_Spring-Summer/ai_63300906/)

# Raimon Panikkar's Notion of Rhythm

Nishikant M. Borge

Dr. Nishikant M. Borge brings out a vital insight of Raimon Panikkar: The Rhythm. There is nothing static in the universe; everything is in a continuous flow; reality is a dance. Rhythm is the very dynamism that unfolds reality, the inter-dependence, the intra-in-dependence, of everything with everything else. Being is rhythmic, rhythm is harmony. Rhythm is in time, and beyond time, ever new, ever fresh. Rhythm makes the perception of the Whole in the concrete possible. It reveals to the *third eye* that the world is the symbol of the Divine. This is the grace of an intuitive perception of the advaitic relationship among beings, a *perichoresis* between the world and the Divine. Dr. Nishikant M. Borge has been the Head of the Biblical Languages Department at Spicer Memorial College, Pune.

There is a general belief that science and technology would help to solve the human and environmental problems. Yet there is a sense of doubt because Man feels that solving economic and environmental crisis is not enough. Deep down in the human heart there is a feeling of the “absence of the Divine” in the world that Man has created. Richard Welford, who comes from the perspective of the business world, states that “the common Western vision of a mechanized world has created a giant chasm between economic development (normally defined in narrow output growth terms) and the individual’s spiritual nature... The more dominant money has become in our society, the less room there has been for any sense of spiritual bond that is the foundation of community

and a balanced relationship with nature.”<sup>1</sup> It is in such human predicament that Raimon Panikkar offers us a vision, which would help us to participate in Reality, in a more meaningful manner.

Those who are familiar with the writings of Panikkar realize the complex interweaving of thoughts from various streams of traditions and religions coupled with deep meditations and reflections, of over sixty years. Hence, it becomes extremely difficult to single out one thought without touching upon so many of his other thoughts. However, in this study, a modest attempt is made to understand the notion of Rhythm, which is so complexly interwoven in his last masterpiece – *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures*. The very essence of this book, in the very words of Panikkar: “To sum it up in a single sentence we all participate in Rhythm, because Rhythm is another name for Being and Being is Trinity.”<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘Rhythm’ also seems to symbolize the ‘way’ Panikkar’s writing has taken – “return of the similar in a new way”.<sup>3</sup> He is repeating what he has been saying for over six decades and what has been believed throughout the ages, but always in a new way – i.e. the Trinitarian vision of Reality. One could say that writing for Panikkar has been an experience of *tempiternity*. “In rhythm we express what otherwise could not be expressed or manifest; the expression is in and through time and yet the real symbol carried by the rhythm transcends time.”<sup>4</sup>

### Nature of Rhythm

The word *rheō*, which primarily means “to flow”, also is used in the sense of *eipon*, which is a derivative of *legō* meaning “to lay”, “to arrange”, “to gather”, and “to say”. For instance, John 4:18 *alēthes eirēkas* - this truly you have said – *eirēkas* is perfect tense of *rheō* (Cf. Matt 1:22, 3:3; II Cor. 12:9; Rev. 7:14). From *rheō* also comes the word *rhēma*

1 Richard Welford, *Hijacking Environmentalism: Corporate Response to Sustainable Development*, Earthscan Publications Limited, London, 1997, pg. 8

2 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, Orbis Books, New York 2010 pg 38

3 Ibid. pg. 41

4 Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, Orbis Books, New York 1973, pg. 46

that means “that which is”, “has been uttered by the living voice”, “thing spoken”, “word”, “any sound produced by the voice and having a definite meaning”.<sup>5</sup> Rhythm the ordered flowing is an expression. Rhythm is primarily an expression that “expresses the very dynamism of reality.”<sup>6</sup>

### Rhythm in the Indic Tradition

Rhythm as the expression of the dynamism of reality is present in the Indic tradition – “The indic *rta*, as well as the greek *kosmos* and *taxis* or the latin *ordo*, all imply a rhythmical structure.”<sup>7</sup> Panikkar expounding on the notion of sacrifice in the Vedic tradition refers to *rta* as the symbol, which enables the understanding of the primordial act of sacrifice. “...Vedic sacrifice... is undergirded by an important symbol... This symbol is *rta*.<sup>8</sup>

As Rhythm is that which “expresses the very dynamism of reality” so also *rta* “is the expression of the primordial dynamism that is inherent in everything and also possesses its own internal coherence, a unifying force that could be said to be the very soul of sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, there is an “ever new” aspect of sacrifice wherein “the whole world appears new every moment and its path unpredictable”.<sup>10</sup> This is because of *rta* “the actual functioning or rather the proper rhythm of the sacrifice, while sacrifice is that which causes things to be what they are.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, *rta* or rhythm is an important notion in the Vedic tradition in understanding sacrifice, i.e. becoming.

### Rhythm as “Ever New”

The dynamism of reality is something intrinsic to reality and something that maintains and sustains the ordered flowing – “a certain

<sup>5</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Harper & Brothers, 1889

<sup>6</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 39

<sup>7</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg 39-40; “Indeed, the vedic *rta* (cosmic order) is undoubtedly rhythmical” pg. 40

<sup>8</sup> Raimundo Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari* Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1979 pp. 349-350

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 350-351

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pg. 353-354

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pg. 351

inner harmony, an *ordo*, that is, a rhythm that makes it a *kosmos*, a *mundus*, an entire universe.”<sup>12</sup> Rhythm, therefore, expresses that intrinsic harmony, which is expressed in Nature as the natural order of time, for instance the seasons of the year or the bearing of fruits and flowers in their due season. It also expresses the human acting according to proper behavior<sup>13</sup> – i.e. a person acting in accordance with his own *ontonomy*.

“There is a rhythm in each and every being” writes Panikkar<sup>14</sup>. The natural world has a *sui generis* consciousness that allows the Nature to follow the Rhythm, whereby nothing is out of its appointed time – its *kairos* – but everything in Nature is natural. Human beings, on the other hand, have the “law of being” (*nomos* of *on*), which is unique to each person. “Ontonomy is the realization of the *nomos*, the law of the *on*, being...where the latter is rather the unique and proper manifestation of the former.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, to realize and act according to one’s own ontonomy is the responsibility of the human beings.

It is precisely because of the uniqueness of rhythm of each being that the Rhythm does not become merely a repetition of an act, but allows each being to follow its own rhythm and respond to the other being always in an “ever new” way. In other words, Rhythm is not merely a mechanical and meaningless repetitive act, but always a fresh and a new beginning.

The rhythm of reality “is the return of the similar in a new way.”<sup>16</sup> Every moment in the unfolding of reality is fresh and new. Saying it differently, each moment opens up infinite possibilities of moments, which Panikkar expresses in terms of the Whole and the Concrete (part). “Rhythm is not an ‘eternal return’ in a static repetition. It is rather the

12 Ibid pg. 76; Cf. Gerhard Kittle (Ed.) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, pg. 870 “The *kosmos* is in the first instance the order whereby the sum of individual things is gathered into a totality... Only later does *kosmos* come to denote the totality which is held together by this order, i.e., the world in the spatial sense, the cosmic system in the sense of the universe.”

13 Ibid. pg. 40

14 Ibid. pg. 54

15 Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, pg. 29

16 Ibid.41

vital circle in the dance between the Concrete and the Whole in which the Concrete takes an ever-new form of the Whole.”<sup>17</sup> Here a word of caution is offered with regard to the Whole. It is not merely an idea of the mind, but rather the “reality of this idea is discovered by the *advaitic* intuition, which sees the Whole in the Concrete.”<sup>18</sup>

### Rhythm as “Ever More”

There is a mysterious dimension of reality, which we are conscious of and yet it remains elusive. Rhythm is that mystery, which cannot be conceptualized, but can be realized only in experiencing it in our spatio-temporal world and that which involves coalescence of the objectivity and the subjectivity.

“Rhythm has an ‘ever more’, but it does not have, properly speaking, a future. You expect, you recognize, but you do not exactly foresee.”<sup>19</sup> Rhythm of Reality cannot be analyzed by rationality and hence cannot be predictable. It has no future in the sense that the future is not pre-determined. The nature of future is defined by a pre-determined course and goal. Rhythm just flows and we cannot know what the next moment will bring. If one moment comes to be, it also opens infinite possibilities of becoming in the next moment and hence cannot be placed in any spatial-temporal frame. The Rhythm of reality is always coming to be and this coming to be has infinite possibilities that are inexhaustible.

The time and space of the first moment is different from that of the second moment. It is different in quality because the very internal structure has undergone change. The first moment is somehow present in the second moment and at the same time the second moment is different from the first moment. No two moments can occupy the same moment because their time is different (their being is different) as well as the same “space”, otherwise they cannot be differentiated from each other. Yet they belong together.

A rhythm is rhythm only for the one who is participating in the rhythm. Otherwise rhythm remains only a construct of the mind. The

---

17 Ibid. pg. 33

18 Ibid. pg. 31

19 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 46

subject, to whom rhythm is a rhythm, is also influenced by it each moment of the rhythm. This influence impacts the objectivity of each moment and the event as a whole. A familiar example would hopefully explain this point. In playing a game the game plays us. The subjective involvement is playing the game and the game playing us. The objectivity of the game is the way the game is played. The game always remains unfulfilled in the playing. It is the same with rhythm. The infinite possibilities that each moment opens up seem to elude our expectation of the second moment. That is why Panikkar states: "It leaves you unfulfilled in expectation."<sup>20</sup>

The open-ended nature of reality – i.e. the "ever more" of the Rhythm – draws us into the Rhythm to participate, afresh each moment, in search of meaning for our existence. In the course of our existence (ek+sit means "to stand out") we are always open to something "ever more" (or something that is always out-standing). This open-ended nature of reality and the human expectation is what draws us to participate in rituals – "a rhythmic reenacting of primordial realities".<sup>21</sup> To put it differently, we can say that rhythm allows us to transcend the linear time (past in linear time cannot be recovered) and reach out into the primordial moments and reenact them as rituals, so that our existence becomes meaningful. Furthermore, we can say that the experience of the "ever more" gives us a sense of experiencing the inexhaustible dimension of reality, thus, experience the Divine.

Rhythm as a movement, an ordered flowing is not to arrive at any pre-determined destination, but rather a manner of living in the present – i.e. living a meaningful life here and now. "Rhythm is both temporal and spatial; it is the combination of different times in the same (apparent) space and of diverse spaces in the same (apparently repeated) time. Linear time is somewhat defeated; rhythmic time is all in the 'timing'. Space is also defeated; the *situs* changes but the *locus* remains the same."<sup>22</sup>

### **Rhythm as a Whole**

A dance is not a dance if it is performed as disconnected movements, disconnected in time and space. There has to be a continuity of

---

20 Ibid. pg. 46

21 Ibid. pg. 47

22 Ibid. pg. 48

movements, such as each movement is lost sight of and only the whole dance appears; in a disconnected movement only the movement dominates our perception and the dance disappears. Each movement by itself does not become a dance. Rather each movement of the dance has to dance with other movements of the dance thereby giving each movement meaning and making the entire dance meaningful. Similarly, Rhythm is also “always perceived as a Whole. It has no real parts. Any partition would destroy the rhythm, which is not the sum of its components.”<sup>23</sup>

“If Being is *rhythmic*, the whole is not divisible into parts... each member is an image of the Whole and the Whole is reflected in its members. Each being is unique and indispensable because the Whole is reflected in that being in order to be whole. Reality has inter-in-dependent order.”<sup>24</sup> In light of this passage we can make some observations:

- a. The use of the word “member/image” instead of “part”; Panikkar refrains from using the word “part” because it suggests something that can ‘exist independently and present its own features’. He prefers to use the word “member/image” because “an image that reflects the Whole expresses the relation between the image and the original in a more accurate way.”<sup>25</sup>
- b. Reality has a specular character, “in which each ‘part’ mirrors the whole in a way proper to it.”<sup>26</sup> That means each member “presences” the whole through itself in accordance to it’s self.
- c. The inter-in-dependent order of reality enables each member to act in accordance with its own ontomony and yet in harmony with the Whole. Inter-in-dependence sums up the manner in which interrelation happens within the Whole. “If Being is rhythmic, each entity will enjoy a real freedom according to its nature in relation to the Whole.”<sup>27</sup>

23 Ibid. pg. 47

24 Ibid. pg. 53

25 Ibid. pg.17

26 Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, pg. 29

27 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 53

## The Experience of Rhythm

“Rhythm is a symbol and not merely a concept.”<sup>28</sup>

Symbol comes from Greek *syn + balloō*, which means “to be thrown together”. This could suggest that the *symbol* and the *symbolized* are “thrown together”. The symbol and the symbolized are not the same and yet they are not separate. “The symbol is the true appearance of reality; it is the form in which, in each case, reality discloses itself to our consciousness, or rather, it is that particular consciousness of reality. It is in the symbol that the real appears to us. It is not reality (which never exists naked, as it were) but its manifestation, its revelation.”<sup>29</sup> The reality that the symbol discloses to us is real inasmuch as it is experienced from within our *mythos*. *Mythos* is that background or horizon over against which our experience of reality become intelligible and that which “gives us the sense of the real”.<sup>30</sup>

The first observation is regarding the symbol and the symbolized. Here the symbolized does not refer to something beyond the symbol, which we imagine: as Panikkar words it, “not the ‘thing in itself, which is a mental abstraction, but the thing as it appears, as it expresses and manifests itself.”<sup>31</sup> The symbolized is the peculiar mode of the coming-into-being of reality in its symbolic form<sup>32</sup>. Here, Panikkar counsels us not to identify the symbol with its reality – “the *symbolic difference*, i.e., to mistake the symbol for the symbolized”.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, reality cannot be perceived directly, but reveals itself to our consciousness through the symbol. This Panikkar calls as “symbolic awareness”. It is in symbolic awareness that a symbol is realized as

28 Ibid. pg. 42

29 Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Orbis Books, New York, 1973, pg. ix

30 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 80

31 R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Asia Trading Corporation, Bangalore, 1983. pg. 301

32 Ibid. pg. 301

33 Ibid. pg. 6

Being<sup>34</sup>. "Realization is not of the order of knowledge, but of presence, of Being."<sup>35</sup>

### **Advaitic Vision/Intuition of Rhythm**

As a symbol Rhythm can be understood as the revelation of Being (where "Rhythm is another name for Being"), i.e. the "very dynamism of Being, its Becoming."<sup>36</sup> Being is Rhythm – the Becoming or the "flowing" of Being is called rhythm. It is in this flowing or Becoming or the constant coming to be that we become aware of Being. However, Panikkar says, "Being is not a thing", which means that it defies any attempt to objectify or define it. The difficulty lies in expressing the relationship between Being and Becoming, because our temporal perspective presupposes Being as "a static substance" that enables us to "affirm that it is the same 'something' that changes", that is Becoming.<sup>37</sup> This problem was also encountered by the Buddhist scholars of China – i.e. between the 'foundation' and the 'appearance'.<sup>38</sup> Here Panikkar offers us the "advaitic vision of Rhythm of Being", which "stands at the 'middle way' between a monistic and a dualistic (or pluralistic) view of reality"<sup>39</sup>.

The "advaitic vision" of the Rhythm of Being is the "middle way" between the perceptions of Being, on the one hand as a monolithic block and, as pluralistic, on the other. The former is "a pyramidal *heteronomic* order in which every level of beings has to follow the norms of another superior order: *heteronomy*" while the latter refers to "a horizontal

34 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 85 "Strictly speaking, the "stone" of symbolic awareness is not just an entity but (a) Being. It is Being in the form of "stone"; it is a symbol of the entire universe, a symbol of Being."

35 Ibid. pg. 203

36 Ibid. pg 51

37 Ibid. pg. 95

38 Mircea Eliade (Ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol 14 (New York: Macmillan Publishinh Company, 1987), pg. 157 "Buddhist scholars understood emptiness within the context of the broad-based Chinese philosophical problem of the relation between the substance or foundation of everything and its function or appearance in the changing world... Seng Chao (374-414 CE) "assumed the identity of substance and function, affirming that emptiness is the foundation of all things that appear through dependent co-arising..."

39 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 52

*autonomous* order in which every being follows its own (*autos*) norms: *autonomy*".<sup>40</sup> To overcome the polarity between heteronomy and autonomy, Panikkar introduces the third and the middle way, namely *ontonomy*. "The order is an *ontonomous* order in which every being (*on*) discovers its proper *nomos* within the Whole: *ontonomy*".<sup>41</sup>

This *advaitic* vision leads us to the *advaitic* intuition, where the term "intuition" is understood in the light of the quotation of Maximus Confessor that Panikkar refers to: "Intuition is the participation in the object which appears when thinking disappears."<sup>42</sup> Just as a symbol, the rhythm also requires *advaitic* intuition to grasp it and participate in the rhythm which is an *advaitic* experience, i.e. a holistic experience that "involves the senses, the mind, and the spirit, the three eyes..".<sup>43</sup>

### ***Advaitic Experience of Rhythm***

"The symbol is not another 'thing', but the epiphany of that 'thing' which *is-not* without some symbol, because ultimately Being itself is the final symbol. Any real symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolized 'thing' and the consciousness of it."<sup>44</sup> In this passage Panikkar utilizes the principle of *advaita*; the first part deals with *advaitic* intuition and the second part deals with *advaitic* experience.

The interrelationship between the symbol and the symbolized cannot be known by reason alone; it requires the *advaitic* intuition. *Advaita* is usually translated as "non-duality", where the prefix *a-* is interpreted as a negative particle. Here Panikkar renders *a-dvaita* as "a-duality", because "the *a* is a primitive prefix pointing to an "absence of duality".<sup>45</sup> The relationship between the symbol and the symbolized is not of non-duality, but the absence of duality – a unique kind of a

40 Ibid. pg 52 Cf. Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, pg. 28

41 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 53

42 Ibid. pg. 298, note 63

43 Ibid. pg. 50

44 Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, pg. ix (My italics)

45 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 216

relationship. In other words, the relationship is not of the order of “either or”, but of “this and that”, where the emphasis is not on ‘this’ or “that”, but on the “and” that stands a metaphor for the relationship of “this” and “that”. In such relationship the duality vanishes and only the relationship remains. This is unfathomable to the rational mind, but can be grasped by the spirit and hence Panikkar states: “Now, the “absence of dualism” is not perceived if we ban love from our knowledge – as any lover knows.”<sup>46</sup> Here a tale from Attar of Nishapur, as narrated by Anthony DeMello in *The Song of the Bird*, would illumine the point of loving knowledge:

The lover knocked at his Beloved’s door.  
 “Who knocks?” said the Beloved from within.  
 “It is I”, said the lover  
 “Go away. This house will not hold you and me.”  
 The lover withdrew and pondered for years on the words the Beloved had said.  
 Then he returned and knocked again.  
 “Who knocks?”  
 “It is you.”  
 The door was immediately opened.<sup>47</sup>

*Advaitic* experience is an experience of union of the objective element, that is the symbolizing symbol, and the subjective element, that is the consciousness of the symbolizing symbol. The subject and the object coalesce in the symbolizer who participates in the symbolizing “act” of the symbol. The overwhelming presence of the symbolized that the symbol presences draws the symbolizer into a relationship such that the symbolizer is totally immersed thus, losing the ego-consciousness. Panikkar calls this as the “*advaitic* spiritual experience” that belongs to the third eye.<sup>48</sup>

46 Ibid. pg.216

47 Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1987, pp. 116-117

48 Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being*, pg. 221

“The experience of rhythm comes closest to the advaitic experience: it is neither consciousness of the monolithic one, or of an ever repetitive monotony, nor the consciousness of a dualistic diversity, or of a fundamentally different tune or movement. It is ever equal and different both at the same and in the same place (be it the muscles of our limb, the flashes in our eyes, or the sounds of our ears). It is a transtemporal experience, something which does not lead us way or distract from time but allows us to pierce through it, so that the kernel of time lays bare before us, as it were, or rather merge and becomes identified with us.”<sup>49</sup>

### Rhythm as *Perichorēsis*

Panikkar says that “rhythm demands a certain type of *perichorēsis*”<sup>50</sup> i.e. inter-permeation of each moment/movement and other moments/movements. Each and every being is permeable, in the sense that it is still in the state of be-ing and hence is constantly coming to-be in and through the participation within the Whole and with other members. Here participation is constitutive of relationships, which “make the things dependent on each other”<sup>51</sup> for the fulfillment of each being and the Whole.

Rhythm is the dynamic interrelationships of all in all. The words of St. Paul are insightful: “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph.1:23 RSV). Here the phrase “all in all” (*pantā en pāsin*) could be an expression of *perichorēsis*. The dynamism that the rhythm is, not only allows for every being to interrelate, but also permeates through all to bring about the fullness of the Whole. This interpenetration also brings about the fullness of each and every being in the “All” (Whole). The Rhythm, the dynamism of Being, is the realm of freedom, in which each being, not only relates to the other beings according to its own *nomos*, but also lets each being to discover its “ever new” or ‘renewed’ *nomos*. “The mentioned inter-in-dependence becomes an *intra-in-dependence*. ”<sup>52</sup>

49 Raimundo Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, pg. 46

50 Ibid pg. 47

51 Ibid. pg. 219

52 Ibid.pg. 53

## Conclusion

"Our world is not a paradise. Rhythm of Being is not a panacea against all evils. The different rhythms may interfere with each other and the harmony is not automatically established. *Ontonomy* is not a totalitarian order. The interconnection of all with all is governed neither by heteronomy nor by autonomy. The relation of all with all is not automatic and one-to-one relationship."<sup>53</sup> In order to establish harmony in our disharmonious world Man has to play a major and vital role.

The "signs of the times" clearly declare that Man and the World are passing through a phase that lies between two epochs. For such times Panikkar wishes to "help awaken the dignity and responsibility of the individual by providing a holistic vision."<sup>54</sup> And this holistic vision comes to us in the language of Rhythm.

The holistic vision requires an attitude of an explorer: venturing into unknown terrains of various traditions and diverse worldviews to gather wisdom; an attitude of a philosopher: a lover of wisdom who is constantly searching for the wisdom of love or as Panikkar says, "loving knowledge"<sup>55</sup>; and a feminine attitude: "to be open to the descending stream of an illuminating light"; and to be drawn.<sup>56</sup>

Finally, "Being is rhythmic, rhythm is harmony, and harmony brings peace and joy."<sup>57</sup>

### Flat No. 29-30; Building "C"

Kumar Priyadarshan

SUS Road, Pashan

Pune 411021

[nmb\\_963@yahoo.com](mailto:nmb_963@yahoo.com)

53 Ibid. pg. 54

54 Ibid. pg. 6

55 Ibid. pg. 216

56 Ibid pg. 175; 335

57 Ibid. pg. 54

# **Raimon Panikkar, the Bridge-Builder among Religions and Cultures**

**His Contribution to a Hindu-Christian Theology**

**Anand Amaladass**

Dr. Anand Amaladass reflects on the contribution Raimon Panikkar has made for an in-depth dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity. Panikkar respects the theological identity of each religion and explores the convergences with the *homeomorphic equivalents*. In this process the polarity of Advaita-Trinity unfolds a deep mystical insight. Similarly the Karma theory can be understood as referring to the existential inter-dependence of humans in a global family. Panikkar makes it clear that without the third dimension, without the third eye, without mysticism there is no fruitful inter-religious dialogue. Dr. Anand Amaladass SJ is Professor at Satyanilayam, Institute of Philosophy and Culture, Chennai, 600041.

In an age of cultural competition and multiculturalism (or cultural absolutism) one looks for a way out of this blind-alley, accepting various traditions and their uniqueness and yet recognizing an underlying unity that holds everything together. Panikkar is one such unique bridge-builder between cultures and religions. His contribution is manifold: he is a philosopher, an indologist, a theologian, a mystic, though none of these titles would do full justice to his caliber. But what is remarkable about him is the way he has affected in a personal way the thinking and life of many people who have taken inspiration from him for their work.

## Panikkar's unique contribution to dialogue

In an article published in *Jeevadhara* (1979) Panikkar proposes his project for a *Hindu-Christian Theology* giving us a broad blue-print of his vision. His proposal is to work towards a Hindu-Christian theology, i.e. a theology valid for both Christians and Hindus, which however does not mean to exclude other religious traditions in India. The main task is to incorporate the variegated experiences of the people into a pluralistic awareness of the human condition. What is aimed at is not a Christianization of Hinduism or a Hinduization of Christianity, but a valid theology for both Hindu and Christian. Panikkar believes that “a purely Hindu effort along traditional lines without the Christian input and the secular stimulation may very well miss the point, run out of inspiration and becomes ineffective. A merely Christian effort without the Hindu contribution and modern spirit may produce more harm than good and even become counter-effective.”<sup>1</sup>

Panikkar pursues this project as a committed thinker through his writings. Just to mention a few of his initiatives: he translated the Vedic hymns with a modern context which inspired many Christians to read the Vedas.<sup>2</sup> He interpreted the Hindu myths like the Prajapati myth of creation in a modern context, Sunahsepa myth of human condition in an intelligible way providing an elaborate cross-cultural context.<sup>3</sup> He developed a hermeneutics of his own to deal with texts of different traditions interculturally. He interpreted the Badarayana’s second Brahmasutra to show the hidden Christic principle unknown to both Christians and Hindus (*Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 1964); this insight he developed later in his monograph the *Fullness of Man: A Christophany* (2004), to mention a few of his initiatives. In the present article one aspect of his contribution is presented which has helped to bridge the

1 “Rtatattva: A Preface to a Hindu-Christian Theology”, *Jeevadhara*, 1979, p. 42

2 *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari, An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and contemporary Celebration*. University of California Press, Berkley, 1977: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, All India Books, Pondicherry, 1983: Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1989

3 *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979

gap between different cultures and traditions, namely, the concept of homeomorphic equivalents.

### **Homeomorphic Equivalents**

His notion of *homeomorphic equivalents* is helpful to build bridges between two or more worldviews, cultures and religions. By this Panikkar identifies phenomena which are found in different cultures and juxtaposes them. This juxtaposition on the one hand shows that these concepts are culturally conditioned and thus limited, and on the other hand this process also enriches both the traditions from which they emerge. They highlight the functional similarity, but do not identify them thus admitting differences and nuances. For example, *Ecclesia-sangha-umma*; *philosophy-karmakannda/upasanakanda/jnanakanda*; *advaita-Trinity*; *incarnation-istadevata*; *resurrection-rebirth* etc. are instances that he deals with at length in his writings.

Panikkar introduces us to the notion of homeomorphic equivalents as a first step towards interculturality. “Homeomorphic equivalents are not mere translations, any more than they merely translate the role the original word (in this case philosophy) claims to play, but they play a function which is equivalent (analogous) or comparable to that supposedly played by philosophy. It is therefore not a conceptual, but a functional equivalent, i.e. an analogy of the third degree. One does not seek the same function (as that exercised by philosophy), but the function that is equivalent to that exercised by the original notion in the corresponding cosmovision.”<sup>4</sup>

To quote Panikkar again, “We are all prone to monocultural approaches to our political situation. The outcome is war. Let me give a concrete case. I believe that the idea of homeomorphic equivalents helps in finding the middle path between those who, under the guise of defending “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, would propagate one single ideology, and those who reacting against that imposition, would not abide by “The Universal Declaration of Human

---

4 R.Panikkar, (1998): “Religion, Philosophy and Culture: inaugural address of the Congress of Intercultural Philosophy in Mexico, 1995”. English translation by Robert Vachon, published in *InterCulture*, Issue 135, Montreal.

Rights,” branding it as imperialist or what not and feel free to transgress those rights. The “Declaration” is certainly not universal, but it is up to other cultures and religions to discover within their own traditions the homeomorphic equivalents so as to be able to defend what we would call the dignity of the person – which would be the factual common language for those engaged in our present-day discussions.”<sup>5</sup>

Panikkar finds the *sanatanadharma* as homeomorphic equivalent of *ecclesia ab Abel*. The traditional understanding of the Church is that it is a *Mysterion Kosmikon*, *ecclesia ab Abel*, *corpus Christi mysticum*, and not mainly an organization. In that sense he understands the Christian belief, *outside the Church there is no salvation*, because the invisible Christian *ecclesia* is only a concrete form of this cosmic communion of the entire universe, outside of which there is no salvation.<sup>6</sup> So also the Hindu tradition emphasizes the existential aspect of belonging. “I accept what I believe to be my Hindu *karma* and I acknowledge my Hindu *dharma*. Both are existential facts that I neither rebuke nor repress. They form part of my being as much as one’s parents are *parts* of oneself. Belongingness is not a matter of choice or sympathy either. One needs a *sampradaya*, so to say. Belonging is an existential fact. The *sanatana dharma* and the *ecclesia ab Abel* are homeomorphic equivalents. Both notions acknowledge the belonging to a cosmic order.”<sup>7</sup>

In this context Panikkar explains further the nature of the religious affiliation. It is to be accepted as a gift. It is not a matter of mere choice nor a brute fact. A Jewish mother, a Hindu father, Muslim birth, Christian baptism may be a necessary condition, but they are not sufficient reasons, if religion is to be less than a genetic fact and more than a social feature. Mere sympathy or intellectual empathy does not make one a member of a religious tradition. There is a *via media* which constitutes the deepest aspect of human identity. The traditional beliefs of *karma* (*karmasamgraha*), *buddhakaya*, ‘mystical body of Christ’ and the like

5 “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, edited by Joseph Prabhu, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p. 244.

6 Ibid. p. 263

7 Ibid. p. 265

are all notions which indicate a blending between a subjective and an objective participation in a religious body.<sup>8</sup>

### Panikkar's interpretation of Hindu concepts

Several concepts from the Hindu traditions are interpreted which are ways of surpassing the boundary walls. For instance, *advaita* is a typical Hindu concept. *Advaita* is not monism. *Advaita* represents the overcoming of rationalism without abandoning the intellect. *Advaita* and Trinity are two-homeomorphic equivalents for the ultimate structure of reality. *Advaita* amounts to an ultimate challenge to intelligibility presented by the human intellect itself: we discover the impossibility of a total intellectual transparency (intelligibility).<sup>9</sup>

“Reality is neither one nor two. It is not one, for we cannot deny evidence: we experience multiplicity. It is not two, for we cannot deny that any duality, epistemologically, logically and metaphysically presupposes an underlying unity which allows that it be doubted, as it were...”<sup>10</sup> The negation of both a dualistic and a monistic structure of reality because of the fact that we cannot bring reality into an intelligible oneness, is the very core of *advaita*.<sup>11</sup> Father, Son and Spirit; Heaven Earth and Man; Things, Concepts and Words, and so forth. This is the cosmotheandric intuition: the *theos*, the *anthropos*, and the *kosmos* as the three constitutive dimensions of reality - different but inseparable.

*Advaita* as homeomorphic equivalent to Trinity is an insightful juxtaposition by Panikkar. Trinity is not a Christian monopoly and *advaita* is not exclusively Hindu. With this proviso one can understand the mystery of Trinity in a different light.

The monotheistic religions for instance believe in the only one God, but understand it differently. The specificity of the singularity of one God lies in its uniqueness. This has a necessary relation to the other

8 Ibid. p. 266

9 Ibid. p. 273

10 Ibid. p. 275

11 Cf. the triadic structure of reality. *The Rhythm of Being*, Orbis, New York, 2010, 212ff

oneness and thus allows itself to be defined only as plural. Christianity understands the singleness itself as plural: He is Father, Son and Spirit. Islam excludes plurality by definition: God is one and thus not plural. If it is plural, then it would not be singular and thus also not God. Judaism understands the singleness in an exemplary way. A fundamental principle runs as follows: If I am there, then everything is there. In Heinrich Heine (A German Poet of Jewish origin) one reads: "Under every tombstone lies buried an entire world-history" (*Unter jedem Grabstein liegt eine ganze Weltgeschichte begraben*). In other words, whoever saves a single human being, saves the whole of humanity. The oneness itself becomes thus not yet plural, but does not stand isolated, but in a basic way connected with the others.<sup>12</sup>

The inter-religious dialogue has at present neither an adequate concept of singularity nor of plurality. The existing dominant exclusivism-inclusivism-pluralism-scheme is logically incorrect and has simply nothing to offer to the question of monotheism. There is a lack of a hermeneutic discussion in the pre-understanding of the problem. In this context Panikkar's interpretation of *advaita* makes sense and clarifies the Trinitarian mystery from the Indian way of thinking.<sup>13</sup>

### **Karma- karmic way of historical thinking**

*Karma* stands for the un-divided, non-dualistic view of reality where the act is not severed from its effect. The karmic view of reality is thus the integrated insight that links all things together, allowing for differentiation and discrimination, but not for separation or ontological dichotomies.<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of fact all the wisdom traditions have been articulating this notion that everything is related to everything else. Today the modern philosophers talk of inter-culturality, inter-cultural philosophy etc.

12 Elmar Klinger, *Mich hat an der Theologie das Extreme interessiert*, Echter Verlag, Wurzburg, 2009, 161

13 *The Rhythm of Being*, 216-227

14 I take the clue from Raimon Panikkar's interpretation of *karma* theory and his insight is the inspiration for my presentation today. Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith And Hermeneutics*, 1979, p. 371,

*Sarvam sarvatmakam* is an ancient statement of the Mallavadins in India.<sup>15</sup> The Buddhist notion of *pratitya-samutpada*, dependent origination, is another formulation of the same insight. The Hindu understanding of *karma* is one such expression of the inter-culturality. Let us now concentrate on the *karma* theory.

*Karma* expresses cosmic solidarity and ontological relationship. *Karma* denotes universality because it is the causal link at work in the universe. The idea of *karma* gives expression, first of all, to this inter-relatedness of everything in the world: nothing gets lost, nothing is isolated or disconnected, any action reverberates to the limits of the universe; there are no hidden or secret actions on the karmic level.

Panikkar formulates this in his own insightful way, when he writes: "The law of *karma* expresses what modern Western language might call the historical dynamism of beings. It is clear that if the centre of gravity resides in and the attention of history is directed towards events easily datable externally, the law of *karma* does not pay them much attention. What the law of *karma* describes and registers are the inner modifications, the happenings internal to the beings themselves; karmic law centers its attention *not on what human beings did*, but on *what happened to them as they did it*."<sup>16</sup>

Here is the core of difference between the anthropocentric notion of history which is Western (*what they did*) and the karmic history (*what happened to them as they did it*). "Karma is the crystallization of actions past, as well as of the results of acts that are no longer in the past, but that emerge and are present in the contemporary situation of whoever bears that particular *karma*. In a way I am as much as what I 'was' and equally what I 'shall be' as what at present I 'am'. Both past and future are already present in my present real situation."<sup>17</sup>

15 Cf . A. Wezler, " Studien zum Dvadasaranayacakra des Svetambara Mallavadin", in *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus . Gedenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorf.* (Hrg.) Klaus Bruhn und Albrecht Wezler. Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1981 pp. 358-408.

16 R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*. Cross Cultural Studies. (New Jersey, Paulist Press, 1978),4. Indian edition: Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983, p.382

17 Ibid. p. 383

### *Istadevata –Christ as Istadevata*

The idea of *istadevata* is developed mostly in *tantra* and the *shakti* schools. Traditionally it is the guru or master who discovers the proper *istadevata* of the *sisya* disciple according to the latter's *guna* and *bhava* (properties and character). It is grace, or karma or providence that the *istadevata* has manifested herself to me. As the representation of the Divine, the *istadevata* is what allows a personal relationship with the Divine mystery. Each *istadevata* covers the ineffability of the Divine Mystery with a beautiful robe. The aesthetic dimension comes into play here. The body, the sense and beauty are essential aspects in this. Between the Christian idea of the incarnation and this conception of *istadevata* there is surely a homeomorphic equivalence.<sup>18</sup>

### Hundred ways of doing philosophy in India (*Satapathaprajna*)

Indian culture does not have a univocal word for philosophy. Western languages have no univocal word for *dharma*. That does not mean that there is no philosophy in classical India and no dharma in western culture. The respective cultures have not found the need to coin in one single word certain human experiences. Western languages have words for religion, duty, essence, element, rule, morals, energy etc. Yet it makes little sense to subsume all those names under any one generic word which could be the equivalent translation of *dharma*. It would be artificial and there is no need for it. Something similar happens for the word philosophy when it is applied to the classical Indian culture. There is no univocal translation. And yet there are scores of names which cover the field of what in the West is called a philosophical activity.<sup>19</sup>

Panikkar has elaborated the notion of homeomorphic equivalents to denote those notions which, as third-degree analogues, perform an equivalent function in the respective systems. Being and atman for

18 *The Rhythm of Being*, 359-364

19 Raimon Panikkar, "Satapathaprajna: Should we speak of philosophy in classical India? A case of homeomorphic equivalents", in *Contemporary Philosophy. A new Survey*, vol. 7, 11-67. 1993

example are neither analogous nor do they share the same function. These two designations nevertheless have a certain relation: a unique relation brought about by the respective corresponding function in the other system. "Homeomorphism is not the same as analogy; it represents a functional equivalence discovered through a topological transformation."<sup>20</sup>

There are three main activities of the human spirit which in one way or another, could be homeomorphic equivalents to the *philosophical* enterprise: *kriya, iccha, jnana*: action, will, knowledge could be the western passwords.

### **Philosophy as *karmakanda*- Action**

The word philosophy has developed a predominantly cognitive meaning. Yet the two Greek components of the word *philo-sophia* suggest love and experience. The Indian counterpart invites one to praxis, to a resolute conscious effort "to work out one's own salvation", to echo Buddha's alleged last word. This praxis element in no way precludes a concomitant cognitive dimension. It only implies that praxis is paramount and that the theory-praxis dichotomy is ultimately making theory short-sighted and praxis weak. Both go together. The symbiosis is philosophy. *Karma-mimamsa, dharma, sadhana* etc. echo this type of thinking.

### **Philosophy as *upasanakanda* – Devotion**

Devotion here stands for the consecration of oneself and of the entire universe. Devotion implies love and service, both to single beings and to the whole of Reality in a conscious way. *Upasana, bhakti, tantra, yoga*, etc. underline this way of understanding.

### **Philosophy as *jnanakanda*-Understanding**

Philosophy is here the liberative knowledge. The philosophical activity is the very reflexive (critical) awareness of our existential path, the intellectual side of the very human pilgrimage. *Vijnana, Brahmajnana, Tattvajnana, Atmavidya, Brahavidya Mimamsa*,

20 Cf. Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, Paulist Press, New York, 1978, xxii.

*Anviksiki, darsana, moksa-sastra, dharmasastra, tarka, nyaya*, etc. are different expressions of this insight.

“The primordial question about philosophy concerns the very nature of the ‘philosophical’ enterprise as the awareness (representation, actualization...) of the ultimate human acts by which Man reaches the fullness of what human beings are called upon, capable of, supposed to, engage themselves upon, ... to be or to become. Philosophy has a claim to ultimacy which is certainly not objectifiable. Not whether we ride a bicycle or whether we speak or think is the philosophical question, but why ultimately do we ride a cycle, how is it that we speak, and what exactly is that which we call thinking; this is the philosophical problematics.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Janmadyasya yatah**

Panikkar’s *Unknown Christ of Hinduism* is an example of cross-cultural dialogue. This study does not refer to the known Christ of Christians or to any “Christ in itself” of which Christian know one aspect and Hindus another aspect under another name etc., as in the simile of elephant. It means this: Each religion is a project to help, enlighten, transform ... the concrete person for the fulfillment of human life. Each religion aspires to the whole as a whole and not to one of its parts. In other words, if I am a Christian and have found in Christ the central symbol of my existence I am not satisfied with being partial, having just my part of the cake and simply acknowledging that others are happy with other parts. A Christian believes that he or she has access to the Logos, the Firstborn, the Alpha and Omega, the light of the entire universe created and uncreated. Christian tradition calls this symbol by the name of Christ.

At the same time Panikkar says that “my ego nor all Christians nor even all my fellow human beings are ever going to exhaust the knowledge of such a Mystery. I discover at the same time that there are other people, other worldviews, other religions (other windows). I may not be able to formulate how they experience reality. I cannot say that they affirm, in

---

21 Ibid. p. 46.

different words, the “same thing” I do. In other words, the “Unknown Christ” is the way the Christian will react when hearing about other religions, Hinduism in this case. The Christian cannot but believe that all that has been said about truth, goodness and beauty are aspects of the Mystery which each tradition calls by its own name and the Christian calls Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

Panikkar clarifies his position with regard to the inter-religious dialogue with different metaphors. For example he is cautious about the tendency to discover a mutual complementarity of religions, for instance, between Hinduisms and Christianity. No religion will be satisfied with a part of the “truth”, even when it accepts that it has not exhausted the whole truth. However, intentionally every religion aims in its attitude to truth always at the whole truth. Therefore the method of dialogue and understanding follows not the Solomon’s judgment. The child must not cut into two parts. Whoever divides the truth does injustice. Life like the truth does not allow itself to be divided; so the art of thinking of the dialogical dialogue and not the dismembering dialectics. The dialogical dialogue is not the *arena*, where one fights, but the *agora* where one speaks. But the *agora* is the entrance to the *temple*, where one is silent – and worships. In other words, without the third dimension, without the third eye, without mysticism there is no religious dialogue and no genuine philosophical discussion fruitful.<sup>23</sup>

Inter-religious dialogue presupposes *metanoia*. Understanding implies a transformation of the understander. Without *metanoia* no fruitful religious dialogue is possible. One of the main difficulties in this field lies in the fear, that we lose our foundation. There is a rational fundamentalism of which we are not really conscious: the fear to lose our firm dialectical standpoint and to appear to be handed over to the other. Without *communicatio in sacris* there can be no fruitful religious dialogue.

---

22 “A Self-Critical Dialogue”, in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, 268-269

23 R. Panikkar, “Stellungname”, in, *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive*, Edited by Bernhard Nitsche. Lembeck/Bonifatius, 2005, 326

Panikkar repeatedly sums up in several contexts the goal of the inter-religious dialogue. Here is one such summary:<sup>24</sup>

1. The dialogue of religions aims at not agreement of various religious teachings, but at a mutual spiritual/intellectual appreciation. This is possible, if we bring ourselves from different points of view and under different kinds of presuppositions closer to the mystery, which is superior to all of us, and therefore demands from us reverence of intellectual humility and forbids us to fix conceptually the Mystery by a well-meant intentionality. It is a question of faith, which is not a monopoly of a single group. It is a religious and not a mere doctrinal dialogue. The teachings are without doubt not only different, but also at times mutually unbearable.
2. Thinking according to models is a useful, but not a necessary kind of human thinking. The interculturality demands something more than the paradigm-shift which has become famous recently. The *kairos* of our situation demands from us to come out of the narrow circle of rationalistic thinking and also to overcome the monotheistic kind of thinking, without denying it. The human being is more (not less) than only *ratio*. A dialogue of faith necessitates other ground-rules (another method) than the exclusivistic discussion about ideas.
3. The Christological model goes with the Trinitarian. Both mysteries go together. A divine Christ outside the Trinity is frightful or atrocious and difficult to believe, as Islam rightly emphasizes. The Trinity which differentiates itself from strict monotheism is not Absolute. It is pure relationality, in which the whole reality is included. Ibn Arabi speaks of a triad: of love, the loved one and the loving one. One can also quote the three uncreated reality of Kabbala: God, the Torah and the

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Gottesdenken in interreligiöser Perspektive*, Edited by Bernhard Nitsche. Lembeck/ Bonifatius, 2005, 354-356. This summing-up comes out as a response to the papers presented in a symposium organized in his honour. The original text is in German and I have translated it here for the first time into English.

people. It is not meant here that this is the Christian Trinitarian image. But they present points of contact. We cannot separate the orthodoxy from the orthopraxis or knowledge from love.

4. The dialogue provides not ready-made answers, but prepares the horizon for a religious understanding, whereby understanding is not to be identified with appreciation. The dialogue is more than a starting-point; it belongs to the contingent human condition. The human is dialogical because he/she is not a monolithic being, but an *anima loquens*. The dialogue belongs to the nature of the humans. As a consequence of it he/she never stops. The Tower of Babel is a symbol for it that even Yahweh loves the difference more than the flat uniformity.
5. The religious dialogue does not allow itself to be reduced to dialectical discussions. Symbols are not just terms or concepts. No party in dialogue should presuppose rules of dialogue *a priori* and then dictate them to silence the other. Still more: the algebraic, purely formal, abstract-logical signs reflect the holistic processes of reality only within its theoretical borders.
6. Religions are not rigid and unmoving traditions. They are living and human-historical appearances which hint at the meaning of life to the respective believers. Even the strictest monotheisms have developed and changed. Even the ‘ultimate’ core in course of time was differently interpreted. There is no human last-word; even the Word of God comes to us contingent beings.
7. The Trinity which is distinguished from monotheism allows a greater elbow-room in religious dialogue. It does not presuppose a stiff intellectual attitude and comes out without relativism. The (ultimate) Reality does not let itself to be reduced to a unity, if it should not become a lifeless and abstract formula, which possesses no existence. It is very significant that in spite of my attempt to differentiate the symbol of Trinity from the Christian Three Persons, it does not seem to allow the monotheistic kind of thinking another interpretation. It is maintained that the

appreciation of Trinity is mystic, which allows itself to be applied to every other religion, if we do not reduce the religions to mere teaching formulations. The Trinity is human invariant; on the contrary the Christian trinity is not a “cultural universal”. There is no such universal, whereby it is not said that there could not be this *de facto* in a definite point of time. Therefore the dialogue remains always open.

8. The dialogue of Christianity with Islam is possible and important, because it concentrates itself on the ultimate essential point. Here the intentionality is important. One must try to perceive the intentionality of every language. Sometimes it is a question of language. The intentionality of a language does not allow itself to be reduced to a mere term or sign. No Muslim and no normal Christian will deny the “Absoluteness” of the ultimate Reality or its absolute Transcendence. So one may speak about it only from a believed revelation. From this revelation one concludes or infers on one finality believed by both sides, because one has so understood the revelation. But no monotheist will deny the sovereign freedom of God, a freedom which does not allow itself to be reduced to our interpretation. He ‘could’ change His ‘revelation, but He will not do it, because He has so revealed it to us, say the Monotheists, - and at least they have so understood it. That is what they *believe*. But none of them will absolutize the faith formulations. One has no other instance outside the belief than that of the respective theologies, which propound the revelation with more or less help of reason. On the theological level the positions are contradictory; but none of them will claim totally the understanding of the Absolute for itself.
9. The objection against the so-called “belonging to the more religions at the same time” presupposes an ontologising of the Western classification system, as it was already pointed out. Panikkar’s personal identity does not allow itself to be reduced to an identification with another side. One cannot affirm at the

same two contradictory propositions (Buddhist/ Non-Buddhist, for instance), but one can love and be loyal to both the parents at the same time, but in a different way. Therefore it is not the case that we equate the identification Christian with an exclusion (for instance Non-Buddhist). Diversity does not mean contradiction. The objection betrays the conditions of a strict monotheistic kind of thinking which is not universal. The confounding or surprising revolution of the non-monotheistic thinking consists therein that no ontological identity statement between ‘being’ and ‘should’ can be made. The divine freedom is preserved, without placing the Divine under the ‘being’. But for that we need a further development in theology.

Panikkar does not speak, as he himself admits, an exclusively Christian language, representing a Christian position to the others. He speaks his convictions. He writes what he believes as he has intellectually experienced. But what he is saying is influenced by his life, and he does not deny his Christian fidelity.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion one could say that Panikkar is inviting us all for an integrated vision of reality, which he calls *cosmotheandric experience*, which requires that we gain a *new innocence*, since we have lost the original innocence which cannot be recovered; this needs a *blessed simplicity*, discovering the mystic dimension inherent within each one of us; only then we could move with *the rhythm of being*. Our goal is to live a meaningful life, which is nothing but being in dialogue with others.

### Satyanilayam

Institute of Philosophy and Culture

Chennai 600041

amaladass24@gmail.com

---

25 *The Rhythm of Being*, p. 256

# Cultural Innovation

## Some Implications of Panikkar's Sacred Secularity

L. Anthony Savari Raj

Dr. L. Anthony Savari Raj reflects on the consequences of Raimon Panikkar's notion of "Sacred Secularity". The Sacred is not above the secular, but the depth dimension of the secular, the meaning-giving source. The cosmotheandric vision of Reality renders the secular sacred. This integral perspective has serious consequences in the areas of politics, science and philosophy: 'development' cannot disrupt Man from nature, technology cannot dichotomize matter from the spirit, philosophy cannot ignore the mystery dimension of reality. Concern for ecological harmony and commitment to the poor are ethical consequences of Panikkar's sacred secularity. Dr. L. Anthony Savari Raj has been formerly a senior lecturer at the Department of Philosophy, University of Madras.

In the works of Raimon Panikkar, we could discern one central insight running all through, which he has called "the Cosmotheandric Intuition." Besides recalling this sophianic insight of Panikkar briefly and critically in terms of what he has christened as "Sacred Secularity", I shall, in this article, attempt to explore and work out the implications of this seminal insight for the issue of Cultural Innovation which has become an imperative and a new task for our times.

### 1. Panikkar's Humour and Sophianic Approach

Panikkar's entire life seems to have been led by a passion (*a pathos*) for a truly *saving* knowledge and by an aspiration for a fullness of life. This *pathos* of Panikkar has equally demanded a proper *ethos*, which is

expressed and shared best in the contemporary aspiration for a “Sacred Secularity” and which appears as a *novum* – a novelty of our times. Panikkar has described the *novum* thus:

This *novum* does not take refuge in the highest by neglecting the lowest; it does not make a separation by favoring the spiritual and ignoring the material; it does not search out eternity at the expense of temporality. Should I call it a passion for bringing together the traditional East with the traditional West, as the oversimplified slogan goes? Or the reconciliation between tradition and modernity? Or is it the outer and the inner, the male and the female together, as the *Gospel of Thomas* says, the *Yang* and the *Yin* of the Chinese tradition?<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note that Panikkar has all along expressed his *pathos* and *ethos* with a kind of “humoural humility”, indicating and affirming that a sense of humour is essential to his method. According to him, it is a sense of humour which will allow not to be attached to one’s own ideas; it is a sense of humour which will permit the unexpected and the surprises; it is a sense of humour which will convince us that all our ideas are only sketches, approximations, stammerings, provisional, symbolic and experiential expressions of the inexpressible; and finally it is a sense of humour which would stand for *humility* which is only another word for courage to express one’s convictions boldly, without fear.<sup>2</sup> In Panikkar’s words:

We believe what we say and stand by our convictions, but know well that there are other ways of expressing what we want to say such that all our words (except formal terms) are mere approximations. We know well that all our insights and beliefs are only glimpses of the Real; we do not absolutize ourselves, nor even

<sup>1</sup> R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being. The Gifford Lectures* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 36.

knowledge... Humility is probably the highest intellectual virtue. It is not about despair, but rather about humor. Humor plays with words and so does the philosopher, and no play would be real if it excludes chance, the unexpected, the unknown.<sup>3</sup>

In a word, humour ultimately stands for humility and it is humility which would serve as the very basis of a Cultural Innovation which this article would like to further explore and elaborate. Cultural Innovation, in short, stands for a culture's willingness and ability to learn not only from *within*, but also from *without*. *Receiving* is the key word. More about this later.

Panikkar's "humorous humility" in the sense described above, indeed stands on Panikkar's sophianic approach to life and reality. Whatever the etymology of *sophia* may be, its immediate meaning, for Panikkar, points to the ability to *orient* oneself in any given context, practical or theoretical. The sophianic approach, to be sure, is a fruit obtained not merely from the tree of knowledge, but also from the tree of life. To quote Panikkar:

This ability in the area of ultimate questions consists not in controlling or dominating but in orienting oneself, sailing into harbor despite sociological winds and philosophical waves. A variety of human cultures have called this wisdom the "vision" of the third eye, the power of faith or mystical experience. We are saying, in other words, that the sophianic approach tries to overcome the pretension of both approaches, the historical (piecemeal) and the rational (formal). I should not emphasize that *sophia* is feminine because in many languages it is not, but the attitude behind this approach is certainly not the typical masculine feature of wanting to grasp, apprehend, dominate, and even know, but

---

2 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-16.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

rather of being grasped, known, assimilated. The underlying problem is that of thinking and Being.<sup>4</sup>

One important embodiment and expression of Panikkar's sophianic approach to reality is what he has called "cosmotheandric." His cosmotheandric vision<sup>5</sup>, in brief, reveals that every reality has three dimensions or three spaces: the space of the Divine, the space of the Human and the space of the Cosmic. Each dimension can rightly be called space because it has "space" for other two dimensions of reality. One space is not without the other two dimensions. The space of God provides space for Man and the World; the space of Man desires God and the World; and the space of the World leaves room for Man and God.

These three dimensions of reality form together a 'trinitarian' or 'cosmotheandric' community in which each member in the community is a dimension of the other. It is in this cosmotheandric communitarian spirit, the fullness or wholeness of reality is to be discerned. Every being is connected to every other being, though every being is inter-independent. A certain spirit of conviviality - enjoying life together and a con-celebration of all the dimensions of reality - is what cosmotheandrism is all about. Separation and consequently manipulation of any of the dimensions are not valued in this cosmotheandric vision of reality. In Panikkar's invigorating words:

Man does not become less human when he discovers his divine calling, or the Gods lose their divinity when they are humanized, or the World becomes less worldly when it bursts into life and consciousness. Perhaps we are saying that Man is at the crossroads, because the real is precisely this crossing of these three dimensions. Every real existence

4 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

5 For a clear exposition of this insight, see R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience. Emerging Religious Consciousness*. Edited, with Introduction by Scott Eastham (New York: Orbis Books, 1993). For an elaborate study of this intuition, see Anthony Savari Raj, *A New Hermeneutic of Reality. Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision* (Peter Lang AG: Berne, Berlin, Frankfurt, New York, Paris, Wien, 1998).

is a unique knot in this trefoil net. Here cosmotheandric vision of reality stands for the holistic and integral insight into the nature of all that there is.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Sacred Secularity

Stated differently, this vision represents, as indicated already, a newly emerging holistic and terrestrial spirituality which Panikkar calls as “Sacred Secularity”. In what follows I shall briefly indicate a two-fold revision that Panikkar’s Sacred Secularity implies and involves, with of course a reservation on each of the revisions.

### 2.1. A Re-vision of Reality

To begin with, Panikkar’s views on secularism and secularity may not be properly appreciated, or even understood, if they are not viewed in the backdrop of his basic insight of Sacred Secularity and his Cosmotheandric or Trinitarian vision of reality.

According to Panikkar, what is emerging in our days is not merely secularism as such or an affirmation of the temporal aspect of the world, but a re-assertion of the sacred quality of the secular world. That is, the secular is seen today in a positive light. The zestful words of Panikkar may be recalled here:

Now, what is emerging in our days, and what may be a “hapax phenomenon,” a unique occurrence in the history of mankind, is – paradoxically – not secularism, but the sacred quality of secularism. In other words, what seems to be unique in the human constellation of the present *kairos* is the disruption of the equation sacred=non-temporal with the positive value so far attached to it. The temporal is seen today as positive and, in a way, sacred.<sup>7</sup>

Modern man has killed an isolated and insular God, contemporary earth is killing a merciless and rapacious man, and the Gods seem to have deserted both man and

6 R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, op.cit., p. 75.

7 R. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (London: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 2, 7, 10-3.

cosmos. But having touched the bottom, we perceive signs of resurrection. At the root of the ecological sensibility there is a mystical strain; at the bottom of man's self-understanding is a need for the infinite and non-understandable. And at the very heart of the divine is an urge for time, space and man.<sup>8</sup>

To formulate these words of Panikkar differently: secular and sacred, matter and mystery, belong together. One is not without the other. In this scheme, then, the transcendence of the divine is to be discerned more in terms of the *transparency* of the world. Divinity is to be discovered in matter's very core. The secular is sacredly secular and the sacred is secularly sacred. They belong together; one is not without the other. Sacred Secularity is, therefore, a prospect that would mark our time as the privileged moment and place for a sacred happening or disclosure in our earthly city.<sup>9</sup>

Hence what is increasingly being realized in our age - partly or even mainly as a result of the process of secularization - is the perspective of a "cosmotheandric" ontomony which stresses the integral connection between the Divine, the Human and the Cosmic, which is best expressed in Panikkar's formulation: "There is no Matter without Spirit and no Spirit without Matter, no World without Man, No God without the Universe, etc. God, Man and World are three primordial adjectives which describe reality."<sup>10</sup>

Significantly, this revaluation of secularity is connected to a new understanding of what it means to be human. "Animal with reason" has been the traditional characterization of the human. But Panikkar's revision of secularity indeed invites to a fresh perception where human is a symbolic or symbolizing being (*homo symbolicus*). Man is a symbolizer, symbolizing the Divine in the Cosmos. Panikkar speaks of

8 R. Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*. op.cit., p. 77.

9 Cf. Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, pp. 9 ff. Vol. IV (Berne 1978), p. 206.

10 Panikkar, "Philosophy as Life-Style," *Philosophers on Their Own Work*, ed. Mercier A., Svilar M., eds.,

a “symbolic difference” which indeed portrays the fusion as well as the difference between the three dimensions of reality, to the extent that reality “discloses itself only as a symbol”.<sup>11</sup> In this connection, to quote Fred Dallmayr:

With regard to human experience, symbolic difference entails that human “secular” worldliness is genuine only in an “ek-static” mode which reaches out to “the other pole, the other shore.” This aspect, we believe, inevitably puts pressure on secularization revealing it as a “constitutively ambivalent” process, a process implying a change - for good or ill - in fundamental human and religious symbols: on the one hand, it can erode or destroy traditional forms of worship while, on the other, it can purify and renew them.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Panikkar’s understanding of secularism may be better seen in the backdrop of his “integral anthropology” which indeed assists and enables to see human personhood as ultimately symbolic or liturgical.

It is precisely on this score, we submit, that some qualms or reservations may surface. To be sure, in Panikkar’s reinterpretation of secularity, secular temporality emerges as the gateway to a possible deepening and enrichment of worship and faith, adequate to our *seculum*. The question is: *Is every kind of secularism or secularization equally conducive to the arrival, or shelter, or retrieval of the divine or sacred?* To recall the words of Dallmayr again, “after all, our age has not been particularly hospitable to faith or the realm of the sacred; in fact, more than others, our *seculum* has been overshadowed by unspeakable horrors (like genocide and ethnic cleansing) and a host of lesser afflictions (like rampant technocracy and consumerist self-indulgence).”<sup>13</sup>

11 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-63.

12 Fred Dallmayr, “Rethinking Secularism (with Raimon Panikkar),” *The Review of Politics*. Ed. Walter Nicgorski, 2000, pp. 724-5.

13 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 731.

What is envisaged, therefore, to be a relational kind of sacred secularity, in point of fact, appears to be a tensional one, where, “falleness”(to use a Heideggerian phrase) rather than openness, concealment rather than disclosure seems to be increasingly the case, with all the contemporary intimations and revelations of the divine, notwithstanding.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.2. A Re-vision of Religion**

Panikkar’s revaluation of secularity is also an invitation to a symbolic experience of reality, where the world is the foundational symbol, symbolizing the divine. Obviously, religion assumes here a new definition. It may be defined then as a search for the integration of the Human with the Divine in and through the Cosmic.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of this new definition, as Francis X. D’Sa remarks: “In future the dialogue between religions will have to concentrate primarily on the relationship between humans and their world, and secondarily about their different understandings of the Divine. This remark is meant not so much to underestimate the importance of the Divine as to stress the manner of approaching the Divine.”<sup>16</sup> D’Sa believes that there will be a kind of religious migration, as we have already begun to witness, from temple to the street, from sacred site to secular practice, from institutional obedience to the initiative of conscience.

Thus many people today increasingly perceive hunger, injustice, exploitation, intolerance, terrorism and war, denial and abuse of human rights, etc. as the pressing religious problems. These problems are cross-cultural in the sense that they are common to everybody. The commonality of problems could therefore be a good and even necessary

14 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 733-4.

15 Cf. Francis X. D’Sa, “The Interreligious Dialogue of the Future. Exploration into the Cosmotheandric Nature of Dialogue,” *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 61, No. 10 (October 1997), p. 703.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 706.

17 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 705.

starting point for religions to join hands and forces.<sup>17</sup> Hence we can expect that dialogue of secular deeds will increasingly take over dialogue of religious doctrines or beliefs.

But - and this is our second reservation - given the context like that in India, is it merely enough to have secular concern as the subject matter of dialogue? Do these secular concerns themselves not need a better focus or thrust? Our submission is that these secular concerns are to be registered as seen more in terms of authentic human or political concerns, because it is human alone who is closer to our possibilities of acting. After all it is the human (symbolizer) who can and will promote efforts that disclose the sacramentality of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Our point is simply this: Besides the emerging and unifying myth of cosmotheandrism as signalled by Panikkar, the concern for human and ecological well-being - focused in those (the *anawim*) whose well-being severely destroyed or threatened - seems to be another, of course, related myth emerging out of the present-day encounter of religions. The religions of the world can come together bridging their differences and finding their common ground in terms of a shared concern and commitment for the welfare of the victims of the suffering earth. This, we believe, may provide a greater and practical content to Panikkar's trinitarian vision as a symbol that can harmoniously link various religions, cultures and traditions.<sup>19</sup>

Hence one would have eagerly and humbly expected Panikkar to spell out, or at least it is incumbent upon *us*: the recipients and interpreters of Panikkar's thought, to discern and interpret more clearly and sharply,

18 Cf. Francis X. D'Sa, "Sacramentum Mundi. Preface to a Cross-Cultural Re-Vision of Sacraments," Paper presented at the Indian Theological Association Meet: *The Church in India: In Search of a New Identity* (Bangalore: NBCLC, May 4-8, 1996), pp. 31-3.

19 Cf. Paul Knitter, "Cosmic Confidence or Preferential Option?" *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, ed. Joseph Prabhu (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. 186-91.

how Sacred Secularity and Panikkar's re-vision of secularism can be related to and provide a hermeneutical foundation for the commitment to the poor and an adequate response to the secular and pressing issues of our times. But this cannot be carried out mono-culturally, but only inter-culturally.

Interculturality, for Panikkar, is based on the emerging conviction that in our contemporary pluralistic human situation, no single culture, religion, tradition or person is totally sufficient to face – let alone solve – any of our human predicaments single handedly. We need a collective and cross-cultural endeavour and ultimately a sense of humility which will permit a perspectival relativization.<sup>20</sup> This indeed brings us to our considerations on the issue of "Cultural Innovation."<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Cultural Innovation**

By cultural innovation, I understand the following: Each tradition, inasmuch as it is not stagnant, has to innovate, transform and regenerate itself not only from *within* but also from *without*, i.e. by accepting inspiration, influence and even correction from outside. But this external stimulus will become effective, however, only when a tradition is able to find a resonance and acceptance in its very heart. As we have already indicated *learning* and *receiving* are the operating words here.

In what follows, I shall highlight very briefly three cultural areas: the area of Politics, Science and Philosophy, and in presenting each of these areas, I shall be guided by the considerations of offering a cultural critique, making a cross-cultural comment, and indicating a possible cultural innovation in the area under consideration.

20 Cf. Panikkar, "Modern Science and Technology are Neither Neutral nor Universal," *Europe-Asia: Science and Technology for their Future* (Zurich: Forum Engelberg, 26-28 March 1996), p. 209.

21 For my earlier considerations on this issue, see Anthony Savari Raj, "Cultural Innovation: Some Cross-cultural Considerations," *Transforming Religion. Prospects for a New Society*, edited by Felix Wilfred, (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2009), pp. 116-28.

### 3.1. Political Innovation

The political area which urgently needs an innovation and a new look is the issue of *development*. The dominant vision of development may be compatible with some cultures, but not with all. In Panikkar's view, the development ideal seems to be a continuation of the monocultural and messianic syndrome of the western culture which desires one mode of development everywhere. Furthermore, not all cultures have the same sense of life as progress and as an orientation of a future goal and the anthropology which underscores the idea of development is not so very adequate to majority of mankind.<sup>22</sup> To recall Panikkar's words:

The idea of development has an underlying anthropology which sees Man as a bundle of potential needs which require only development in order to make life happy and meaningful. Development is the anthropological counterpart to the biological theory of evolution. Man develops in the same manner as the universe is set on evolution. This is an empirical proof that something is fundamentally wrong with the ideology of development.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the idea of development is not conducive to those traditional visions which allow no separation between the goal and the way. These visions stand for discovering the destination in the way itself. If not, we can well imagine the consequence: alienation. We may never feel at home if we are all the time preoccupied with the goal of development in future. Can life not be lived in all its fullness, even when we are not sufficiently *developed*?

---

22 See Riall Nolan, *Development Anthropology Encounters in the Real World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002).

23 Panikkar, "Ecosophy," *New Gaia*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Michigan: Eco-Philosophy Centre, Winter 1995), p. 3.

Or again, the developmental ideal appears inadequate also from a cosmological point of view. The ideal of development assumes that matter is dead, and is meant only for resources to be tapped for human upliftment. But we are only beginning to see the consequences. As Panikkar notes:

Technological system in which most of us live, any technological micro-progress implies a macro-regress, sociologically-speaking. Any little thing which is an improvement here will have somewhat negative repercussions somewhere else. Antibiotics produce population explosion, subsides to European agriculture lie at the root of famines elsewhere. The reason is very simple: once the rhythms of the earth are broken and once we have reached the limits of the planet in all aspects, then any increase will here result in a decrease somewhere else.<sup>24</sup>

The political innovation that we are suggesting, therefore, seems to operate on another word which Panikkar indicates as “awakening”: people “on the way to awakening.”

“Awakening would suggest a new awareness concerning the meaning of life, the reality of the earth, and the sense of the divine. Awakening could amount to perceiving better with our ears and eyes and mind, discovering the invisible dimension of things. It is not the privilege of the few who have “made it” because they are developed.”<sup>25</sup>

24 Panikkar, “Philosophical Investigation of Sustainable Development: Fundamental Issues,” Proceedings of the International Conference: *Living with the Earth. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Sustainable Development: Indigenous and Alternative Practices*, Montreal: Intercultural Institute of Montreal (April 30-May 3, 1992), p. 30.

25 Ibid., p. 34.

Needless to state these inspiring words become alive in the context of the mutual fecundation of cultures. They also do “justice” to the experiences of more than one culture.

### 3.2. Scientific Innovation

The second area which needs an innovation is the field of science and technology which have emerged as the “New gods” in our times.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, “the scientific caste today has accumulated a power on life and death immensely superior to any other caste of any other-period of human memory.”<sup>27</sup>

This only shows that science has not maintained its original purpose of being a “saving knowledge.” In this sense it has become perverse.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, modern science, and more specifically, technological science owing its origins to the West, it has also helped its economic development and expansion. It is not therefore neutral and universal.<sup>29</sup> In this connection Panikkar makes a distinction between human invariants and cultural universals. While *techne* is a human invariant, a kind of a common denominator, technology is not. The latter is a construct of the West. Moreover, “for *techne*, we need spirit (in-spiration), for technology, we need a special cognitive “know-how” (*techno-logos*).”<sup>30</sup> Panikkar’s words are instructive here:

The difference between technique or *techne* and technology is patent in the word itself. *Techne* is art, it is the human capacity of instilling human spirit into

26 Cf. Hawkin, David J., Ed., *The Twenty-first Century Confronts Its Gods: Globalization, Technology, and War* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

27 Panikkar, “Ecosophy,” p. 6.

28 See Ibid., p. 4. Also see Ashis Nandy, *Science, Hegemony and Violence* (Delhi: Oxford, 1988). March 1996, pp. 205-09.

29 See “Europe-Asia: Science and Technology for their Future,” ETH Zurich : Forum Engelberg, 26-28

30 Ibid., p. 207.

matter and giving life to matter. The author of *techne* is the artist who has to be inspired in order to produce a work of art. The spirit, the *pneuma* is the real creator. Technology is the substitution of the spirit by *ratio*; reasoning reason is its author. Technology is not there to make a pot, but to produce thousands of pots in the minimum of time and cost – otherwise there is no point in having the thousand pots. In the language of the above-made distinction, technological society is an organization and not an organism.<sup>31</sup>

The above words only imply that the values of technology are not universal and they further, seem to be at loggerheads with those of the traditional cultures, especially in their visions of matter, life, space, time and so on. The contact of the technological vision with other cultures has produced what Panikkar terms a “*conflict of cosmologies*.<sup>32</sup>

The scientific innovation, therefore, will be first of all reducing Modern Science to its proper limits. “Not all epistemology is “scientific”; not all cognition measurable; not all knowledge is covered by “Science”. Modern Science cannot be said to know the world or to have penetrated the nature of Reality.”<sup>33</sup> Though it is through the technological science the economic and other developments and expansion have come about in the western societies, yet modern-day western scientific culture is not the only scientific culture possible even in the West. Furthermore, its suppositions are not universal and are not shared by other cultures and ways of life in other parts of the world.

The non-separation between the human and the nature, the recognition of non-rational or mystery dimension to reality, the desire

31 Panikkar, “Cross-Cultural Economics,” *Interculture*, Oct-Dec 1982, Vol. XV, No. 4, Cahier 77, p. 32.

32 See Panikkar, “The Dharma of India,” p. 106.

33 Panikkar “A Nonary of Priorities,” *Interculture*, Vol. XXIX, No.1, Winter 1996, Issue no. 130, p. 53.

to forge a communion with nature, and so on are the thrusts of non-western cultures. These values perhaps assist the technological culture in relativizing its values, and suggest that there are other ways of approaching and leading life.

The traditional cultures, through their *vitalistic kosmology*, experience the universe not as a mechanical or sophisticated organization, but as a living organism which requires from us a holistic and creative participation and collaboration.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, there is also a need for the traditional cultures to simultaneously turn towards the spirit of the new situation of humanity and assist, assimilate and effect a transformation within in ways that are needed and possible.

### **3.3. Philosophical Innovation**

Philosophical innovation would stand for a re-assessment of the dominant mode of time which operates behind our belief in history and progress. It is the historical mode of time which is in fact at the basis of the idea of development and the scientific enterprise.

Development presupposes an attainment of a goal in future and science has at its heart a sense of linear time. While development implies a future fulfillment, science pays attention also to the beginning of time. But both of them share in the common idea of not finding fulfillment in the present time. Marching towards the future is the paradigm and goal of life for both of them. A preparation and living for the future seem to be the model of an ideal education and life. The present life is only an intermediary stepping stone for the one to come in the future. The goal is never here and now, it is always to be found later. History means not merely a narration of the past, but it is mainly a hopeful and at times hopeless parade towards a known or unknown future destination.

The destination of this parade may be indecisive and not very clear, but not so its motivation. It is an ambition towards “success.” Success is not the only thing, it is *everything* and has to be measurable and monetizable. Progress is the modern *mantra*. Work is the modern way

---

34 See Panikkar, “The Dharma of India,” p. 113.

of finding salvation. This salvation can come about only if we keep running (working) all the time, even if it brings only alienation and total restlessness. Any temporary progress now is only a glimpse of a greater thing to come in the future. Panikkar insightfully observes:

Modern life is preparation for *later*, for the time to come. Credit, growth, education, children, savings, insurance, business—all is geared for later, oriented toward the possibilities of a future which will forever remain uncertain. We are always on the go and the quicker the better, in order to gain time. Without planning, strategy, preparation and purpose for the future, our lives are inconceivable. Temporality haunts modernity; the time factor is the aspect of nature to be overcome. Acceleration is the great discovery of modern science. Individually and collectively, our lives are all bent forward, running toward the goal, the prize, in unrelenting competition, heading toward the “Great Event.” Soteriology has become eschatology, sacred as well as profane.<sup>35</sup>

The philosophical innovation, therefore, would consist in reassessing the idea of history and progress in the light of other cultural perceptions and orientations. If history and progress are the measurements of human life and experience, then obviously a greater part of humanity would not be able to fit into this scheme.

And yet for millennia years these cultures do have nourished millions of people, even when they could not “make it” according to the dominant economic paradigm. Even in the hardest times and in face of greatest survival struggles, people could face life with joy and dignity precisely because they have been sustained by a hope.

This hope, however, is not merely of the future, but in the “invisible dimension of reality,” a kind of “tempiternal hope.” In Panikkar’s words:

---

35 See Panikkar, “The Contemplative Mood: A Challenge to Modernity,” *Interculture*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, Winter 1996, Issue No. 130, p. 39.

For the majority of the peoples on the earth, the aboriginal people, the slaves, the out-casts, the starving people, the sick, the oppressed, the women all too often, true hope cannot be of the future; it has to be of the invisible, of another dimension which makes life worth living even if I live five years or under exploitation. To make out of the necessity a virtue may not be sociologically advisable, but for the oppressed people it is the only chance of keeping their human dignity. It is certainly not a vice.<sup>36</sup>

This dimension may be ever-eluding, or ever-escaping, but ever-present as the ever-more dimension of reality. Panikkar has called it a *transcendental attitude*, which does not necessarily mean an explicit belief in transcendence.

It means an awareness accompanying every action, that life on earth, is only a kind of "comedy", "divine" or not, a sort of play, a re-enactment of something bigger than ourselves and yet taking place within ourselves. Rebirth and transformation, heaven and moral responsibility, whatever religious underpinnings they may have, entail a firm sentiment that we are not private proprietors of our life, but actors and spectators of it. We live as if we were performing a role which is greater than us, transmitting a little worse or a little better of the life which we have received.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, it is this "cosmic confidence" which does not allow people to be totally crushed by circumstances, however inhuman they may be. Can we not therefore have joy while struggling and find fulfillment while still on the way?

On the other hand, the philosophical innovation would also represent the effort of the traditional cultures to revitalize themselves as they come into contact with the dominant modern culture. This effort may be seen in their resolve to take history and progress seriously and

36 Panikkar, "Ecosophy," p. 7.

37 Panikkar, "The Dharma of India," p. 110.

to identify and overcome all the traditional notions and elements which have not been so very helpful to a fuller flowering of authentic human life.

More concretely this would mean to pay a greater attention to the questions of human right, poverty, a degeneration that has come about in the caste structure and all the conditions that deny a normal human living to millions of people.<sup>38</sup> Pressing problems such as lack of food, housing, healthcare and education would need an immediate attention. In other words, the traditional cultures should do a re-assessment of their traditional values in the light of human welfare, particularly in favour of the oppressed and downtrodden.

As we have already indicated, this re-assessment would only be greatly stimulated, complemented and enhanced by the contemporary aspiration for a Sacred Secularity and we are immensely grateful to Panikkar for having been its principal advocate and co-sharer.

62 Murugan Koil street  
Santhosh Nagar  
Chennai 600099  
ansraj@sify.com

---

38 Cf. Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), esp. pp. 23-45.

# **Raimon Panikkar's Mantra for Discovering Meaning in Life “The Cosmotheandric Vision”**

**Jacob Parappally**

Dr. Jacob Parappally touches the heart of Raimon Panikkar's theology: the cosmotheandric vision. With it Panikkar gives a mantra to grasp the meaning of human existence in a net-work of relationships. It is also a theological critique on the divisive forces and discriminative structures of society. The human person understands him/herself as a mirror of the entirety of reality. For imbibing this vision Christ comes as the universal principle, the embodiment of the cosmotheandric unity of reality. Christian faith thus enables to look at oneself and the world as a Christophany. Dr. Jacob Parappally MSFS, formerly Professor of Theology at Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, is now the Director of Tejas Vidya Peetha, Bangalore, 560060

Raimon Panikkar's *Mantramanjari* is well-known. It opened the hidden-treasures of wisdom in the ancient Vedas for the modern seekers to get an insight into the mystery of reality in a language and idiom meaningful to them. He is acclaimed for this monumental work both by the Hindus and the Non-Hindus. But there are other mantras he discovered to unravel the mystery of reality through his dialogue with religions and cultures, synthesizing and articulating them with the joy and wonder of a child, critical mind of an adult and deep insight and wisdom of an elder. He expressed them through so many sutras either short or long but always offering an opening and inviting those who are

interested and committed to Truth to look in to the mystery of Reality! When I think of Raimon Panikkar, one of the greatest Gurus of our time, who influenced the lives of many and left this world ‘without leaving’ it a year ago, making a difference in the lives of many, it is the mantra of discovering the meaning of human existence in the net-work of relationships. It fascinated me and affected my life for better. It is in my search for discovering the meaning of Christ in the multi-religious and multi-cultural context of India that I found Panikkar showing me a way hitherto unknown to me, a way that left a lasting impression on me. He influenced my way of experiencing God in Christ, the mystery of the humans and their world and my theological thinking and articulation of it in a pluralistic society. In him I found a variety of insights and thoughts, symbols and myths, cultural thought patterns and religious beliefs encountering one another and finding concordance. In him they all could transcend and provide a new level of recognizing reality in its depth so that one can be affected by it. It is in my personal meetings with him that I realized the warmth, sincerity, depth and transparence of this person who is convinced of his insight that every human person is a knot in the net-work of relationships; he communicated that I belonged to him and he to me and to all in the web of this relationship.

## **1. Panikkar’s Mantra to Discover Oneself**

Every human being raises from time to time a fundamental question: “who am I?”, “what am I here for?”. Some feel so bogged down by these questions and leave everything in order to find an answer. The pilgrimage to enter into the mystery of one’s own being is not an easy path. In the Indic tradition with the help of a Guru one may be able to attain a certain insight into oneself. A Guru can offer a *mantra* to facilitate this process of discovering oneself, and the other dimension of the Reality, like God and the world. *Mantra*, etymologically, means an “instrument of thought”. From the depth of his experience and from the wealth of his wisdom Raimon Panikkar offers such mantras in order to assist us in our search for discovering the meaning of our existence in this world. The quest for meaning is a fundamental quest of every human being and what Panikkar has discovered in his search for meaning inspires and challenges us.

One of the mantras Panikkar gives us to discover ourselves is to experience reality through a *cosmotheandric* or theanthropocosmic vision, where the whole reality is seen in its threefold dimension, namely, *theos*, *aner* and *cosmos*. We are not going into the details of this mantra. Suffice to say that it is a vision which does not deny the differences between the three dimensions but would even recognize a hierarchical order in the three dimensions. The three dimensions are distinct and different but are not separate or divided. They constitute the entire reality. It simply means that there cannot be any God without human being and the world. There cannot be any human being without God and the world and there cannot be any world without God and human beings. It is not a philosophical statement or a theological doctrine. It is a fundamental intuition which Panikkar offers to discover the height and depth, length and breadth of one's existence as a human in relation to the entire reality: God, other humans and the world. The emphasis is on the intrinsic relationship among them. One cannot be there without the other dimensions. This mantra gives the most liberating vision to experience who we are and what we can become. It also challenges the blindness of humans who divide and separate themselves in the name of caste, class, gender, language, ethnicity, nationhood etc. and try to discriminate, destroy, conquer, enslave and dehumanize. The intolerable inhumanity of humans expressed through war and violence, genocide and extermination, the politics of domination and control, oppression and exploitation etc. originate from a consciousness that cannot see the inter-relationship among us and its demands on each one to nurture and deepen this relationship as a human vocation.

In this mantra of Panikkar we can discover that we are not isolated individuals or monads but persons. According to Panikkar, a person is neither singular nor plural but a conjunction. Relationship is ontological and constitutive of a person. "A person is unique and incomparable, and in some way a mystery, for uniqueness is the phenomenological expression of any ontological mystery: it cannot be compared, there is

no point of reference: it remains a mystery.”<sup>1</sup> Further, Panikkar affirms that, “a person is a bundle of relationships, which cross at a certain centre which we may call personality, or even, if we insist, individuality, but this centre can in no way be regarded as synonymous for a person.”<sup>2</sup> An individual is a practical, pragmatic and artificial abstraction and is a concept limited to quantification. It is a concept for practical purposes and answers the question *what* one is and not *who* one is. The dichotomy between individual and society can be avoided, according to Panikkar, if we take into serious consideration the integral anthropology in which the human is not considered as an individual but a person, and society not as a sum total individuals but as the natural and personal field of human interaction.<sup>3</sup>

The mantra of discovering oneself as human in a radical relationship with the entire reality is further explained by Panikkar showing the difference in understanding between individuality and personhood. According to the traditional and etymological definition of an individual, we may say that a thing has a singularity when it is indivisible in itself, undivided, atomic (*in se indistinctum*), and it has individuality when besides this, it is different from others (*ab aliis distinctum*). Panikkar distinguishes these two and argues that here one could distinguish a double principle of individuation, a principle of singularity which depends on external factors in order to distinguish one from another and a principle of individuality which belongs to the constitution of beings which are capable of self-identity. Panikkar says, “There is no singularity if not over against a plurality. To call a single something which cannot have a plural is contradiction in terms. Individuality on the other hand, does not need to be quantitative and stands for the internal constitution of those beings which have certain possession of their being.”<sup>4</sup>

1 R.Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, Bangalore: ATC Publications, 1983, p.377

2 R.Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, New York: Orbis Books, 1973, p.4

3 Ibid.

4 R.Panikkar, “The Meaning of Christ’s Name in Universal Economy of Salvation,” in J.Pathrapankal (ed.) *Service and Salvation*, Bangalore, 1975, pp.204-205

In order to discover each human being as a person existing and living in inter-relationship with others Panikkar introduces one into the mystery of *ontonomy*. It is the highest level that the human consciousness has reached in the course of its unfolding in history. Panikkar has presented three stages in the historical development of this consciousness. They are heteronomy, autonomy and finally ontonomy.<sup>5</sup> In the heteronomic world-view reality is seen to be hierarchically structured, *nomos* or law of every being is a higher instance and is regulated by it. In the autonomic world-view, the world and the humans are seen to be *sui iuris*, each one a law unto oneself. But in the further evolution of human's self-understanding as humans, according to Panikkar, humans realize that reality is ontonomic. Panikkar's understanding of ontonomy overcomes the monolithic view of reality and also individualistic attitudes. He says, "Ontonomy is the realization of the nomos, the law of *on*, being, at that profound level where unity does not impinge on diversity, but where the latter is rather the unique and proper manifestation of the former. It rests upon the specular character of reality, in which each 'part' mirrors the whole in a way proper to it."<sup>6</sup> Intuition into the ontonomic structure of reality opens our mind to see the radical relationship of everything even before we recognize it and live accordingly. It makes us realize how we are inter-dependent. In one's own personal history one can detect the evolution of consciousness from heteronomy to autonomy and finally to ontonomy. Though at the personal level these stages cannot be separated strictly one from another, still one can detect the emphasis of each stage in the course of one's development as a person. One can also understand the reasons for conflict in personal, communitarian and societal and even national level and its disastrous consequences. It is mostly because of the struggle between those who have not let their consciousness evolve from heteronomy and autonomy to ontonomy. Ontonomy recognizes the radical relationality of all beings, sees reality as an integrated and harmonious whole in which polarities

5 R.Panikkar, *Kultmysterium in Hinduismus und Christentum-Ein Beitrag zur Vergleichenden Religionstheologie*, Freiburg/Muenchen, 1964, pp.78-86. Panikkar develops the same theme in *Worship and Secular Man*, pp.28ff.

6 R.Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man*, p.29.

are seen distinct but not separated from one another. It gives us an intuition into what we are. It is an intuition that gives us an awareness that we are not separate from the others. It can further lead one to the realization that I am another I and even the Ultimate "I" or a 'thou' of the Ultimate in my own distinctive and limited way without losing my identity as human and without becoming God! Humans can realize their ultimate goal of becoming fully human by consciously and freely actualizing their ontological inter-relatedness in existential sphere by a right relationship with other humans, the world and God. It is in discovering one's identity in this world in relation to the other and the Ultimate Other that one finds meaning in life.

## **2. Panikkar's Mantra to Discover Christ as the Meaning of our Life**

The most challenging mantra of Panikkar for human transformation and for the discovery of the meaning in life, according to me, is his intuition into the mystery of Christ. Panikkar has opened to me, and I hope to many others, the length and breadth, the height and depth of the mystery of Christ that cannot be contained by dogmas or doctrines. In fact, the mystery of Christ, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the source and the finality, the origin and the goal of everything that exists, is the infinite Christ, the absolute meaning of everything. In this I discover the meaning of my life as well as the meaning of every human and the entire cosmos. Panikkar is not offering a theory or theology, a category of thought or a philosophical proposition but a vision. I cannot but be affected by this vision of Christ. Once I am drawn into this vision of the larger or the largest icon of Christ that can envelop everything that exists, I begin to see how all explanations about him, including many revelations about him are only minimal and even small. Of course, the scriptural revelations, Christological dogmas and doctrines can reflect the mystery of Christ and that is their purpose as a drop of dew can reflect the sun. But the problem with many would be to hold on to the drop of water that reflects the sun and neglect the sun itself or even refuse to look beyond the drop of water to see the reality of the sun.

Panikkar's attempt is to liberate Christ from a narrow, limited and sectarian understanding and invite all who are searching for the meaning of their lives to find in him another polarity of their own persons and thus discover him as the beginning and end of their lives or the meaning of their lives. The answer to the question addressed to Jesus by John the Baptist through his disciples, "are you the one who is to come or are we to expect some other?" (Mt 11:3), is very precise in referring to the identity of his person in relation to what he is performing (Mt 11:5-6). This answer may look evasive if we are searching for a conceptual *Who*. But the *Who* of Christ cannot be individualized by mere "here or there" as he is constantly 'the coming one'.<sup>7</sup> He cannot be conceptualized or categorized. He needs to be encountered. If one is searching for the individual and what he performs the answer to the question is appropriate because he is the individual who is performing the messianic functions. But is he only the fulfillment of the messianic expectations of the Jewish people? Is not what the New Testament struggling to communicate that he is more than a messiah of the Jewish expectations? Is it not true that the first disciples, the evangelists, Paul and others, had no categories to express the mystery that they had encountered, but opened only a window through their witness to this reality that matters everything to everyone in order to find the fullness of life? The Christ, revealed by the Father and the truth of him which is constantly taught by the Holy Spirit in the depths of human hearts cannot be reduced to some historical categories or to some dogmatic statements about him.

For the Christian proclamation it is vital to communicate who he is. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit proclaims: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11). The name of Jesus Christ in which alone there is salvation, is not a nominalistic label, a magical formula or a sign because that cannot be a saviour or mediator. This name which saves, according to Panikkar, is a real symbol. "It is a symbol, i.e., the

7 R.Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation" in: Dhavamony M.(ed.), *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development, Documenta Missionalia*, Rome, 1972, p.195.

very 'thing' as it appears and is in the world of our experience."<sup>8</sup> A pure thing does not exist and nothing can exist without a name. Since any name with a meaning has an ontologic constitution, it is neither purely subjective nor objective. The name is a real symbol because it is thrown between subject and object. If there is salvation in "no other name", there is salvation only through the reality intended by this name. It also implies that this reality can be encountered by people having other world-views, cultures and religious traditions which have another meaningful name for this reality which for Christians is constituted by no other name than that of Jesus Christ.

If we insist on understanding Jesus exclusively in historical categories, we will only discover him as a great man of history but we will not be moved to any personal relationship with him. "Jesus will appear as a historically relevant figure of the past, with a still uncommon influence on the present, but the only point of reference will be his historical coordinates and his impact on the lives of other men."<sup>9</sup> For the Christian who encounters the risen Christ in faith cannot but identify him as the historical Jesus. That is the guarantee that the Person who enters into the very structure his being had a human existence at a particular time of history. But then he knows too that it was a limited existence even though it was of utmost importance that God became human in history. The Christ of the believer's existential and personal experience transcends the historical constraints and limitations. Panikkar uses the example of the Eucharistic presence of Christ which is the real living Christ one encounters in communion. Here the real presence of Christ is not identified with the historical existence of Jesus. Separated from the faith dimension, outside this personal encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus would be as any other religious founders. Then he would be considered ,a remarkable Jewish teacher, who had the fortune or misfortune of being put to death rather young".<sup>10</sup> Panikkar asserts that

8 Ibid., p.197.

9 R. Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation," p. 212.

10 R. Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Bangalore: ATC Publ., 1982), p. 27

the living Christ of every Christian generation is invariably more than the above description of Jesus.

According to Panikkar, Christ is to be seen not only in the limited Abrahamic or Semitic tradition but also in the cosmic tradition of humankind and in all authentic religious traditions. The whole Christ is historical and trans-historical, pre-existent, historically existent at a particular place, time and culture. He is the living one who can be encountered in the sacraments, in all human beings and especially in the deprived and the depraved. He is the most perfect expression of the complete harmony between everything that is Divine, Human and Cosmic or Cosmotheandric reality. This person who makes the human, the divine and the cosmic communion possible cannot be thought of only in spatio-temporal categories. It is true that it is in Jesus of Nazareth that a Christian encounters Christ. But the Christ of the Christian believer transcends the historical limitations of Jesus of Nazareth. But this insight of Panikkar should not be construed as his attempt to separate Jesus of Nazareth from Christhood as some of his critics accuse him of separating the two. But the Christ of Panikkar is not an a-personal principle. "The Christ that sits at the right hand of the Father is the first-born of the universe, born of Mary; he is the Bread as well as the hungry, naked or imprisoned."<sup>11</sup> This Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Christ who reveals himself in Jesus of Nazareth. Panikkar's attempt is to overcome the tendency of Jesuology which makes Jesus an idol without transcending him which Jesus himself did at his resurrection.

In the context of Christian faith, the Person of Jesus Christ is not one among many, and so the principle of singularity cannot be applied to him properly. The principle of individuality would refer to what makes Jesus, Jesus or the 'what' of Jesus or the thing-in-itself. This will not answer the question of *who* Jesus is or of his identity as a living Person. Panikkar is not saying that one cannot distinguish Jesus as a historical figure from James or John. But in the traditional Christology, Christ is not a single individual in the sense of other historical personages, simply

---

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

a member of the species. “Christ has human nature indeed, he is Man but he is not a human person. He is divine person, the second person of the Trinity having assumed human nature.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, following the Christology of Chalcedon, Panikkar says that Christ is human but not one human, a single individual; he is the divine person, incarnated and is in hypostatic union with human nature.<sup>13</sup> But the presence of Christ for the believer here and now is the divine presence. Panikkar admits that if we push this doctrine too far we may end up in docetism or disincarnationalism. The principle of singularity cannot be applied to Jesus because he is not simply a numerical exemplar of a species of human mortals. But then how to defend his true humanity? Panikkar says that if we insist on that the humanness of Jesus has to be defended, this is to insist that the man Jesus has something peculiar, which, while not diminishing his humanness, transcends it in such a way as to make possible a *sui generis* relationship with him. This uniqueness of Jesus is the very negation of singularity and individuality. Panikkar affirms that the living Christ of Christian faith who is present in the sacrament and in others, who transcends time, with whom one can enter into personal relationship, does not fall in the category of an individual in the philosophical and current sense of the word.

According to Panikkar the important issue is encountering Jesus Christ as true God and true man. The encounter is possible when identity can only be said to be real and thus true if we enter into a personal relationship with him. Only then may one discover the living Christ of faith who lives in the interior of oneself.<sup>14</sup> In this experience one realizes that Jesus is the person who does not fall into the category of singularity or individuality and his character is “not singleness but communion, not incommunicability, but relations”.<sup>15</sup> So in Peter’s confession of faith,

12 R.Panikkar, “Meaning of Christ’s Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation”, p. 205. Panikkar refers to P.Schoonenberg who discusses the problem of the unity in Christ as a person who is divine and human at the same time. P.Schoonenberg, *Ein Gott der Menschen* (Zuerich, Einsiedln, Koeln: 1969), p. 92.

13 R. Panikkar, *Ibid.*, p. 205. 14 *Ibid.*, p. 212

15 R.Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality, the Supername* (Santa Barbara: 1972), p. 32.

that thou art Messiah, the Son of the living God, the only universal element, according to Panikkar, is the *thou*. This *thou* is not the projection of one's own ego, and the issue is not to elucidate the predicate of this sentence but to discover existentially this subject. This *thou* cannot be and should be pinpointed by an unequivocal means of identification as it would lead to idolatry which is a sin against the Spirit. Therefore, according to Panikkar: "The word Jesus has two basically different meanings: one as historical category and another as personal category. The former is reached by means of historical identification, which permits us to speak about Jesus and about the belief Christians have in and through him. The latter is reached by means of personal identity and allows us to discover him a 'part' or rather pole of our personal being, as one of the many traits that make our person."<sup>16</sup>

In his cryptic and often misunderstood statement, "Christ is the Lord but the Lord is not only Jesus",<sup>17</sup> Panikkar is trying to overcome the limitations of the understanding of Christ in the historical category. It is unfortunate that many do not understand or do not care to understand the reasons Panikkar has advanced to show that the core of revelation in Jesus Christ is divine grace to enter into the unfathomable and incomprehensible mystery of God as far as possible for humans. It is obviously, hitherto unparalleled disclosure of the Divine. Any attempt to reduce it to manageable categories of thought or making it an idol which one can clasp and grasp would be almost rejecting the sublime and unique revelation of God. It is an invitation to be in Jesus and enter into Christ without separating one from another. It is a liberating and salvific encounter with God. One should not trade that with anything including one's life. It is the meaning of one's life. In it we discover that we are unique dimensions of Christ and indeed a Christophany! It is a liberating experience both for the one who encounters Christ as well as a liberation of Christ from the traditional limitations placed on the reality

16 R. Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation," p. 212.

17 R. Panikkar, "Have Religions the Monopoly of Religion?" in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Editorial), 15 (1974), p. 409

of Christ. Panikkar says, "Although it is a concrete form of expressing the universal, christophany liberates – perhaps one should say redeems – the figure of Christ from a particular culture. It also liberates from political, and philosophical monotheism, as well as anarchical polytheism, both of which are at the origin of so many civil wars throughout the 'created world'"<sup>18</sup> It is a transforming experience to know that one is a christophany and that everyone and everything is a christophany. It is another way of affirming the Christian faith that everything is created in him, through him and for him (cfr. Col 1:15) and Christ is the *alpha* and the *omega* of creation. In Christ humans realize who they are and what they can become. They can encounter themselves as a unique dimension of Christ, a christophany without losing their identity as humans. They can reach the fullness of their being human when they realize their identity as christophanies in their own unique way. They are distinct from the reality of Christ but not separate from Christ.

Panikkar's deep insight into the mystery of Christ and his vision of Christophany as the fullness of humans are based on his understanding of Advaita and the Trinitarian relationship explained in the Christian tradition. For Panikkar, advaita is not non-duality or monism as it is often translated. It is an intuition into or an experience of the relation between God and the world or the Absolute and relative as *not one but also not two*. One cannot be identified with the other and also cannot be separated. This mystery of inter-relationship that makes up the entire reality is also seen in the Trinitarian experience of God as an absolute communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It also reveals that in the perichoretic relationship the three Persons of the Trinity are 'distinct but not separate, different but not divided' as Tertullian would affirm. When this experience is reflected upon and when it becomes a conviction for us we begin to wonder at the reality of our being in relation to everything that exists. Then, we will be able to celebrate the plurality of everything that exists as we begin to appreciate them as distinct from

---

18 R.Panikar, *Fullness of Man: A Christophany*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2006, p. 15

us but not separate from us. Finally, we would be able to recognize, celebrate and live our identity as another dimension of Christ, a christophany, embracing everything and living our responsibility as manifestations of Christ towards other humans, to the world and to God.

### Conclusion

Raimon Panikkar has made significant contributions to the development of catholic theological thinking from Indic world-view and resources. He has liberated Christian theology from being a captive of Greco-Roman, Mediterranean cultural mode of thinking and Eurocentric orientations. Both the tyranny of the *one* and the anarchy of the *many* can be dangerous for the evolution of theological thinking and for the transformation of human persons and the societies. He has successfully shown that the catholicity or the universality of theology has to evolve from the mutual fecundations of various contextual theological reflections and concerns. Panikkar's mantra of discovering oneself in a net-work of relationships and one's unfolding as a person and discovering the meaning of one's life in the Christic mystery not only offers the possibility of recognizing the dignity of every human person but also opens the possibility of encountering the reality of Christ as the real beginning and end of everything in which one can find oneself as a christophany. Panikkar continues to be a Guru for me, constantly challenging me to discover the richness of the Indic tradition and let it dialogue within me with the core values of my Christian faith and make my theological reflection and articulations truly catholic and contribute to the development of theology and authentic human life in relationship with all that exists.

**Tejas Vidya Peetha**

Kumbalgodu.P.O.

Bangalore-560060

Parappally@gmail.com

